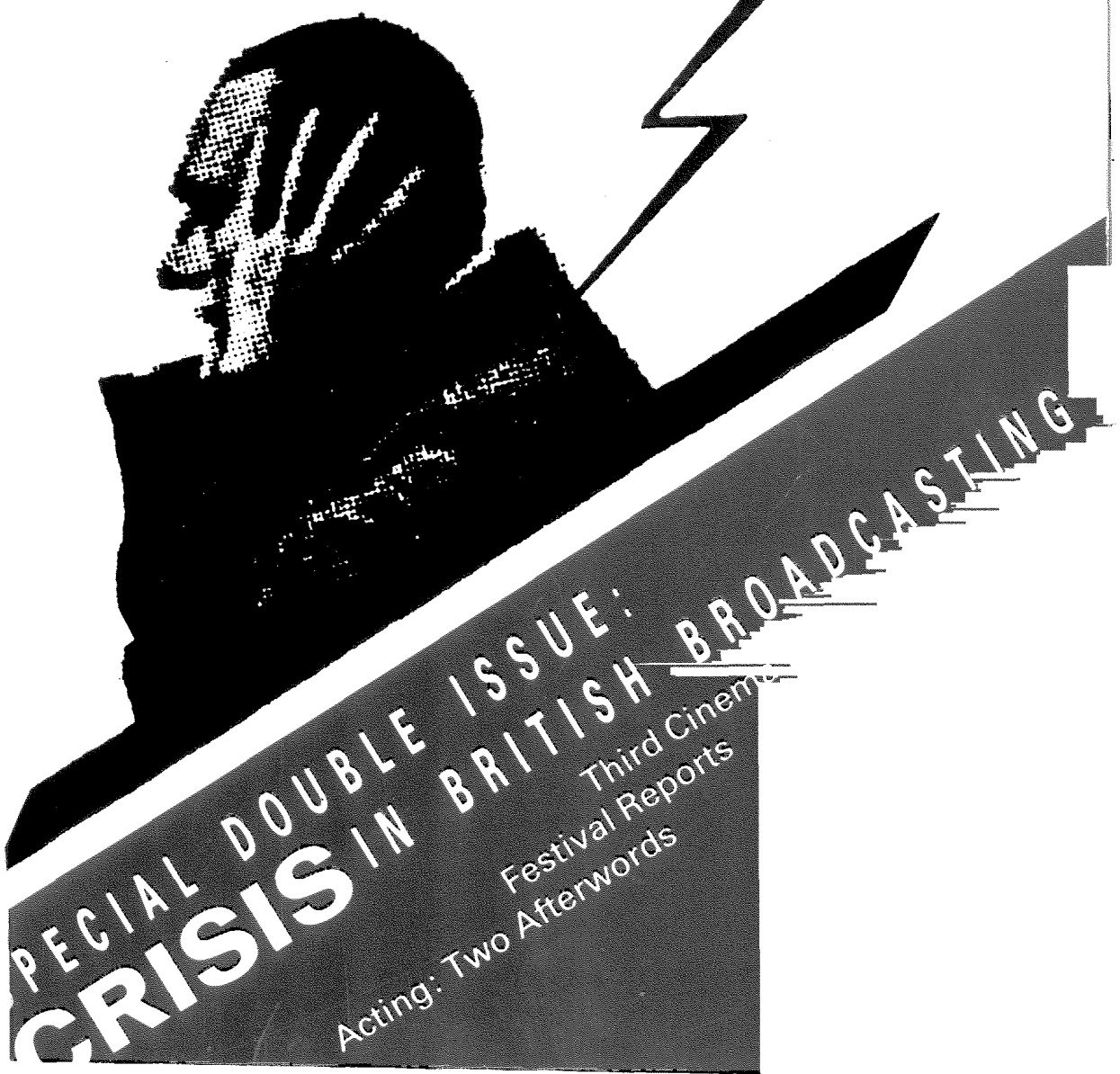


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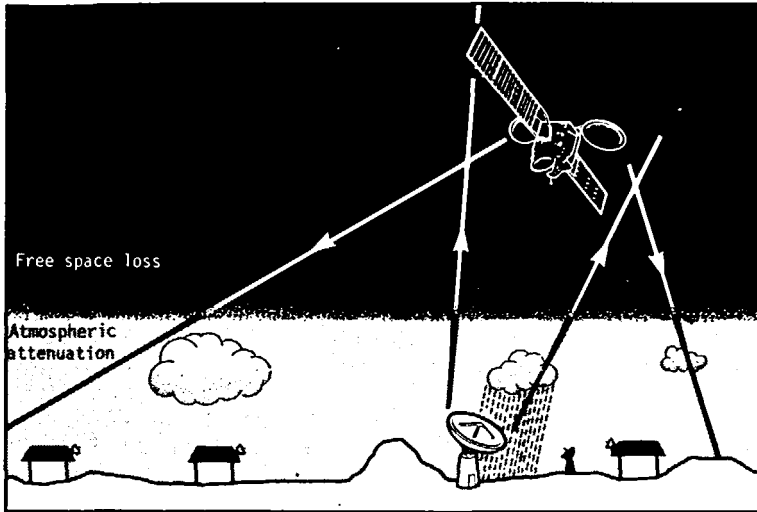
SCREEN

INCORPORATING SCREEN EDUCATION



SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE: BROADCASTING
CRISIS IN BRITISH
Third Cinema
Festival Reports
Acting: Two Afterwords

INTRODUCTION



It has become a cliché of the mid-80s to describe British broadcasting as, at best, 'in transition' and, at worst, 'in crisis'. Certainly under Thatcher's monetarist, privateering government and in the face of a whole range of innovative and often transnational broadcasting technologies, the monopolistic position of the old Reithian 'public service' system – and its perceived legitimacy – is crumbling fast. The next step in this inexorable process could well be the report of the Peacock Committee into possible alternative forms of funding for the BBC, set to appear in the early summer. This report, commissioned by the Tory government and hastily compiled over the last twelve months, could, in one fell swoop, undermine the economic foundations of 'public service' broadcasting and completely change the ecology of British television which has obtained for the past 30 years.

It is to coincide with the appearance of this report, and to discuss some of the implications of these wide-ranging shifts in Britain's broadcasting system, that we have produced this special double issue of *Screen*. And in recognition

of the current centrality of the discussions around Peacock, we include a summary of the submissions to that Committee, by Steven Barnett and David Docherty of the Broadcasting Research Unit, who also offer some informed estimates of its likely findings and recommendations. For the rest, the authors of this issue take a whole range of positions on the significance, desirability and possibilities of these imminent transformations – and how we might intervene around them. But they all agree that we ought to transcend the narrow terms in which the public debate is currently posed. Broadcasters, politicians, commentators and activists alike have shortsightedly spiked themselves on the horns of the 'public service' versus 'deregulation' dilemma. Meanwhile, genuinely radical alternatives to this simplistic dichotomy coming from beyond the mainstream, have been excluded – and the real *de facto* successes of the commercial de-regulators in already undermining universally accessible, publicly-funded broadcasting, quietly ignored. Criticism of the status quo should not stampede us into blindly replacing the authoritarian, and

exclusive, public service system, for an equally authoritarian 'free market'.

Curiously, many of the doubts about these new technological possibilities and the prospect of deregulation raised by both Reithian conservatives and large sections of the left have struck a very similar negative tone. Fed on the one hand by a Leavisite belief in the moral superiority of 'high' literary values, and on the other by the Frankfurt School's deep suspicion of popular culture, this uneasy alliance has coalesced around the elitist slogan of 'wall-to-wall Dallas' as the fearful epitome of a deregulated transnational broadcasting future. Built into this response is a deeply-engrained hostility to US cultural forms. In particular there's the shared belief that that country's television is trivial, degrading and intrinsically destructive of indigenous cultures – while British TV production is presumed to embody such 'high standards' of 'seriousness' that it enlightens and educates all those who are privileged to set eyes on it. Several of this issue's contributions are axed around this problematic.

Richard Collins, for example, offers a useful corrective to the much used, but rarely analysed thesis of 'cultural imperialism', as it applies to the international trade in TV production. Supporting his argument with a wealth of persuasive data, he demonstrates that it is simply not empirically true that the flow of US TV exports to Britain inevitably outweighs British exports to the USA – the balance of trade favoured Britain from 1977 to '81 and could do so again. Neither is it possible to argue, on an analysis of the ratings (though Collins is somewhat uncritical of ratings methodology), that US TV imports are automatically more popular than home-based productions. Certainly we can't extrapolate from the undoubted economic dominance and massive popularity of US cinema in Britain during the last forty years to a similar situation in the TV industry. And perhaps the US TV market itself is not unassailable by foreign imports. More importantly, though, Collins takes issue with the central argument of cultural conservatives, of left and right alike, that US TV products are bad in themselves, and points to the positive features of serial melodrama, for example, and their successful assimilation into many popular British 'soaps'.

Frank Webster and Kevin Robins, however, are much more pessimistic. Their historical survey of broadcasting argues forcefully that it has been increasingly used as a form of social control. They see the central feature of modern media as the incorporation of authentic, self-generated working class pleasures into the capitalist market – the penetration of Taylorist management technique into all areas of leisure activity and private life. In its latest manifestations TV in particular is argued to be little more than a sophisticated arm of the marketing industry – and the consumerist values which that industry promulgates represent 'one of the fundamental constraints on twentieth century life'. Within such a context, public service television in its British form can only be seen as an anachronistically beneficent anomaly, a local obstacle on the global march of consumerism, which restricts British broadcasting's full advertising potential. As such, Webster and Robins conclude, without any great conviction, that public service broadcasting should be defended, as the best base from which to pose more democratic, popular alternatives.

Sean Cubitt takes issue with this analysis, pointing out firstly that attempts to control 'subversive', popular forms of working class leisure and entertainment pre-date the period of consumer capitalism by more than 200 years. But more significantly he challenges their characterisation of a consumerist media machine which is homogenous, all-pervasive and ultimately unstoppable, arguing instead that the system is much more 'leaky', unpredictable and contradictory than that. In particular he points out that certain developments in radio, for example, have been sites of real working class struggle – and that the history of media in Britain is, and will continue to be, determined by a resolution of real contradictions, genuine moments of resistance, rather than imposed monolithically according to the game-plan of consumer capitalism. Moreover, left critics and advertisers alike have begun to question the notion of television as a sophisticated, reliable advertising medium which unfailingly delivers viewers into the consumerist fold. The meanings of TV's words and images – both the programmes and the commercials – are much more multivalent and unpredictable than Robins' and Webster's analysis would

4 acknowledge. As such, Cubitt argues, the realm of meaning, the area of audience reception and comprehension, constitutes yet another site of potential resistance.

A more oblique interrogation of the 'media as consumerism' thesis (and its concomitant 'public service is best' conclusion) is provided by Ken Worpole, in an interesting analysis of the unrecognised division which has bedevilled cultural production in Britain at least since the seventeenth century – that is, between legitimate/licensed forms of theatre, music and writing and those more popular forms of expression deemed illegitimate and consequently either ignored, suppressed or in more recent times under-funded by the state. In relation to broadcasting Worpole relates in detail how the BBC in particular has played a central part in celebrating and disseminating official, 'legitimate' culture, while excluding all that was seen as vulgarly popular – and how it was this cultural blindness that 'sold the pass to commercial forces'.

Of course all these debates and developments are taking place in an international environment – in fact are being heavily determined by that context. So it's in recognition of this international dimension that we include contributions from overseas which illustrate two extremes of the problems now facing us. First, Doug Gomery, who regularly keeps British and European *Screen* readers up-to-date with media developments 'stateside', gives a fascinating run-down of Rupert Murdoch's attempts to break into the US TV market by forming a fourth network to challenge 'the big three', NBC, ABC and CBS. Certainly Murdoch's heavy financial commitment (more than 2 billion dollars over four years), including the acquisition of Twentieth Century Fox, goes a long way towards explaining the urgency and brutality with which he has treated his 5000 former British newspaper employees (sacked during a dispute over trade union rights and staffing levels in January of this year). This attack is evidently motivated by his desperate need to maximise his already considerable UK profits to help finance his risky US television aspirations.

A contrasting reference point is provided by Jostein Gripsrud's account of the intense debate currently animating Norwegian broadcasting, which illustrates quite powerfully how, for better or worse, British 'public service' models –

including more lately Channel 4 – have influenced Scandinavian broadcasters and politicians. And although Norway is only in the process of establishing its first commercial channel, in opposition to the state-run TV company, it is salutary to see the way that virtually every facet of the British situation and the debate surrounding it has been reflected and refracted in the Norwegian experience. It is always important to realise that we are not going through these agonies alone – enormous trans-national processes are at work here which find their echoes, and demand solutions, in every national context.

So what are the answers? What are the alternatives? We include two contributions which offer some radical programmatic solutions to the structure and content of a future broadcasting set-up. John Ellis discusses the historic inadequacies of British state control and direction of broadcasting over the past 40 years. Although recognising the necessity for state regulation of scarce and expensive broadcasting resources, he argues that changes in the national TV ecology (ITV, Channel 4, TV-AM etc) have been instituted by the British state in a piecemeal and reactive manner, rather than being thought through and planned adequately. And British regulatory bodies have consistently renege on their legal obligations. For Ellis the key-word of successful broadcasting reform is diversity. A federal pluralistic model like the Dutch system – with different channels from a range of originators and producers holding distinct and open political positions – is proposed as a possible healthy variant. As well as guaranteeing cultural and political diversity, this multiplicity of decision points is also seen as the best way to avoid state intervention. Similarly, Ellis argues that a diversity of funding – state- or local grant-aid, the license-fee, advertising and subscription – could all be fruitfully combined, to achieve a TV system not dependent on one single, potentially vulnerable, source of income.

The Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom has established itself as an influential voice in the trade union movement and the Labour Party in the struggle for a more democratic, accountable media. Here Janet Whyatt offers their Broadcasting Committee's response to the Peacock deliberations. The history of the BBC, Whyatt argues, has been one

of gradual diversification away from the notion of one, national, homogenous culture. With the break-up of the post-war political consensus, this process has undoubtedly been accelerated, so that critics of left and right have begun to call for the dismantling of the BBC under the technical catchphrase, 'narrowcasting'. Whyatt sees such developments, accelerated by opportunistic commercial interests looking for more, cheaper advertising outlets, as an ominous overture to the withdrawal of universal state provision of television and radio, in the same way that private health care is gradually supplanting the NHS. For the CPBF 'community radio', at least a la Thatcher, is the broadcasting equivalent of 'community care' in the health sector – i.e. broadcasting on the cheap. And 'narrowcasting' in a privatised system, as the US experience has shown, could mean programming only for affluent sectors of the population. In the face of the dominant tendencies of Thatcherite media policy – de-regulation and privatisation – the CPBF call for a policy of re-regulation of all media sectors, including cable subscription services. Genuine, non-commercial local radio and TV projects could then be subsidised with the levy on commercial TV profits. And the TV licence fee should be graded according to income, number of TV sets etc. But who would regulate the regulators? Local and national broadcasting authorities would be elected to make them more accountable and representative of the wishes of the widest range of producers and viewers.

While there is a certain positive overlap between the positions of John Ellis and the CPBF, particularly in their stress on diversity and accountability, they also share two debilitating silences which I'd like to comment on. Both, for different reasons, view broadcasting as, of necessity, a large-scale, expensive, 'macro-system'. CPBF explicitly reject 'narrowcasting' as leading to the formation of 'ghettos', without examining the varied senses in which that term might be used. There's no recognition of the possibility of using broadcasting technology on a more personal, micro-scale – 'every receiver a transmitter', as Enzensberger argued in his influential 1970s essays. This is not to claim that

such uses could replace larger scale broadcasting operations, in some Schumacherian fantasy. But the possibilities ought to be allowed for – both technologically and legislatively – as part of the fragmentation of the homogenous, 'mass' notion of media, which we have argued is vitally necessary for the liberation, or at least pluralisation, of the airwaves.

Secondly, both Elis and the CPBF, on the evidence of these contributions, share what Julie Sheppard and I have described elsewhere as the 'aims-control-access' view of media reform, which implicitly regards the structure, production-relations and technology of TV as potentially benign or at worst neutral.¹ The solution is then seen as merely replacing the institution's professional personnel and spokespeople. Such a view has much in common with the popular, but increasingly problematic, 'use-abuse' model of science (nuclear fission is OK, it's just the way it's used that's bad...).

But technologies, and the social relations that have formed and maintain them, are not neutral in regard to political and social purposes – choices and priorities are inscribed indelibly into all of them. And television's equipment and organisation are no exception. They were developed to serve an authoritarian, hierarchical broadcasting system, and cannot be transformed into liberating tools by an act of will – or by installing nicer, more representative people behind and in front of camera. I would want to argue that these technological forms and the production relations of television (maintained in part by the broadcasting unions) are very powerful arbiters of TV's meanings, and must be recognised as such, and then consciously transformed, if we are to move on to something more accountable, representative and democratic.

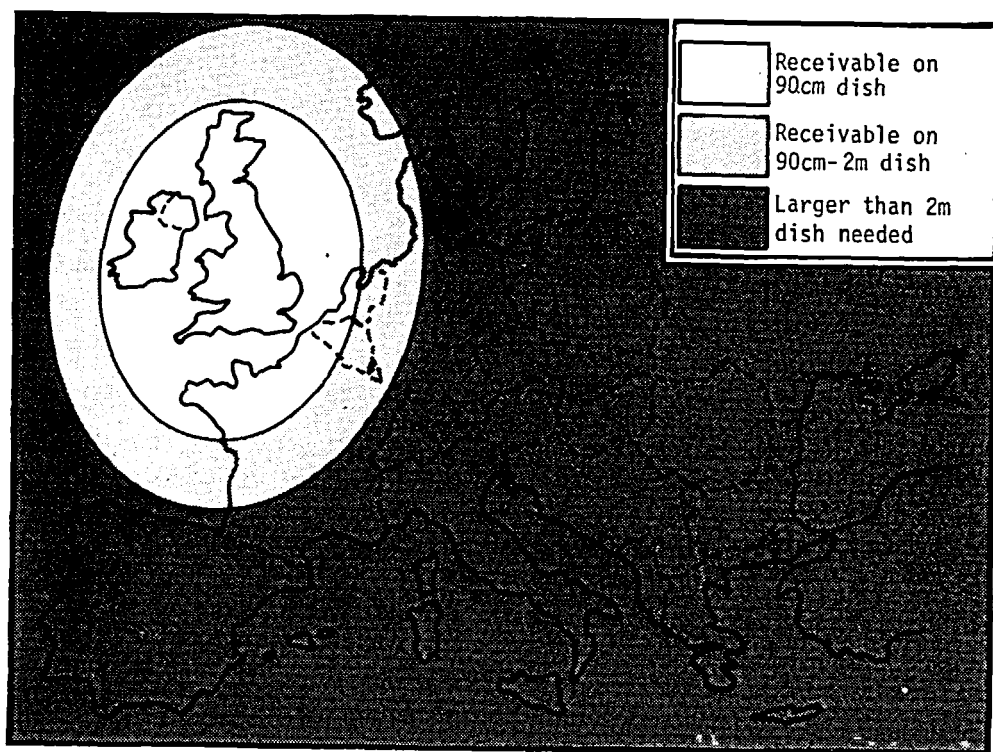
CARL GARDNER, GUEST EDITOR

EDITOR'S NOTE: My thanks to former Editorial Board member Carl Gardner for his helpful collaboration on the editing of this special double issue. Thanks also to the outgoing members of the 1985-86 Editorial Board, especially our long-serving colleagues John Ellis and Annette Kuhn, whose many contributions to *Screen* and the work of the Society have been greatly appreciated.

¹ Carl Gardner and Julie Sheppard, 'Transforming Television – the Limits of Left Policy', *Screen* March-April 1984, vol 25 no 2, pp 26-38.

BROADCASTING AND THE STATE: BRITAIN AND THE EXPERIENCE OF CHANNEL 4

BY JOHN ELLIS



Satellite 'footprints' enabling European viewers to pick up programmes on a range of receivers.

THE CURRENT DEBATE around the expansion of broadcasting talks of 'deregulation' and 'opening national broadcasting to

international forces'. Currently fashionable proposals concern competition within national broadcasting arrangements, and transnational multi-channel satellites. The role of the state in broadcasting is relegated to the scrap-heap of history—along with questions of ethics, culture and even commercial viability. In its next phase broadcasting (by which I mean television broadcasting, as radio is already transnational) seems likely to be constituted by the haphazard results of large-scale gambles by media entrepreneurs. There will be precious little of the 'freedom' promised to producers or consumers. The level of financial risk is too great: the costs involved in launching satellites, of feeding multiple channels with entertainment material and laying cable to supply signals, all preclude a multiplication of the kinds of people and ideas that can be involved. Broadcasting will remain a high-cost activity, further complicated by the high degree of initial capitalisation involved.

In such a context, the state has to be involved. The state has to ensure that social values countervail those of the market. And nation states equally have to agree common rules of conduct for transnational broadcasting operations. We have not yet reached the stage where TV broadcasting is a candidate for 'deregulation': it is in no way comparable to publishing, where a multiplicity of outlets exist—books, magazines, newspapers—on a local and a national level so that state regulation can be seen as anathema. With TV in Europe, we have no equivalents of books and magazines; we are merely seeing the creation of the equivalent of national newspapers. Even in the United States, those equivalents of magazines that have been created (specialist cable channels) have had an extremely difficult time: though MTV (music video) and weather forecasts have proved financially viable, the attempts at a 'Culture Channel' have all collapsed, and even some feature film entertainment outlets have had to merge.

Broadcasting, then, is still legitimately the subject of national political debate, and of state intervention or regulation, even in those places where 'deregulation' has gone furthest. However, the state in many countries has proved singularly unable in the past to respond to this role. Television has not been regulated by principle: it has been the subject of political expediency, 'damage control' and improvised ideas. Perhaps this was inevitable when the shape of broadcasting and the nature of broadcasting were profoundly unknown even to its participants. The national broadcasting systems that have evolved through this process are strikingly different and serve their publics and cultures tolerably well. But now we know a lot more about broadcasting and its role in our culture. Surely it is time for the state to learn as well, and conduct its broadcasting policy according to publicly debated principles rather than a disorganised retreat in the face of (false) calls for a 'free market'?

The example of Britain and its evolution towards a rather weird mixed system can reveal many of the problems and blindnesses of state broadcasting policy. For British broadcasting is inching its way towards a crisis, a crisis caused to a large degree by the state itself: the Thatcherite state.

Britain's national broadcasting consists of one large quasi-state conglomerate, the British Broadcasting Corporation, responsible for two national television channels (one with about 40 per cent of the audience, the other with about 10 per cent) which is nominally independent of the government, financed through the sale of mandatory TV licences, and responsible for its own internal regulation. A different regulatory body, the Independent Broadcasting Authority, is responsible for the two channels that carry paid advertising: one again with about 40 per cent of the audience, the other with 10 per cent. But these two channels are not supplied with programmes by a large corporation like the BBC, they are supplied by commercial production companies, under two different arrangements. The mass channel, ITV, has been divided by the regulatory body into a series of regions, each with a single contractor (except London, where there are two) responsible for supplying the whole week's viewing. In practice, almost all of the output is shared, creating a national network. The minority channel, Channel 4, is a national channel whose central broadcasting organisation commissions its programmes from independent suppliers, rather than making them itself. Half of the material comes from the companies that have regional ITV franchises. Half comes from large and small independent production companies, most set up specifically to supply Channel 4. Channel 4 aims to be self-sufficient, funded from advertising. But in the short term it is funded by a subscription levied by the IBA (the regulatory body) on all the regional ITV franchise holders. They, in return, sell the advertising space on Channel 4 in their region. After three years 'on air', some are breaking even or showing a profit.

This system is the result of piecemeal regulation, and has created a delicate 'ecology', in the current expression. Each new facet has been created by the state to counterbalance the last one: the state has been reactive rather than innovatory. Even so, several lessons about the principles that should govern state intervention in broadcasting can be gained from the British example.

The BBC was the government of the 1920s' response to the demands by the manufacturers of radio equipment that the state and not they should be responsible for supplying radio entertainment and information. Initially a private company set up by a conglomerate of radio manufacturers, it was nationalised by a Conservative government and made into a state broadcasting monopoly. At the heart of this BBC were two principles: first, that the BBC should be a single corporation with a monopoly of radio (and subsequently TV) broadcasting; second, that it should have formal independence from the government in its own internal affairs, yet the government should appoint its Board of Governors (a formula often used in British politics with some success). Both of these principles have proved defective. The notion of the independent but government appointed Board failed the vital political test of real power

with the 1926 General Strike. The then Director-General, John Reith, put the BBC's broadcasting potential at the service of the government, rather than at the service of moderately fair reporting. More recently, the BBC's independence has been further eroded by the Thatcher government's attitude to appointments to such 'independent' bodies. Where previous governments, Labour and Conservative alike, have appointed a mixture of the apolitical and the opposition's supporters as well as their own, this government's appointments have been deliberately partisan. The second aspect of the BBC's initial constitution was the cause of more concern from the late 1930s onwards. The nature of the BBC as a single corporation with a monopoly of broadcasting quickly led to a pervasive internal complacency (of which Reith's gesture in the face of the General Strike might also be a symptom). The BBC was slow to innovate in matters of programme-making, especially where popular culture was concerned, as well as the presentation of news and the interrogation of political figures. Even in the 1950s, Members of Parliament agreed scripts in advance rather than submit to real questioning. And in that decade, with its rapid increase in viewing, the BBC's conservatism became an acute problem.

As a result, the British state began to consider a corrective measure: the creation of a second television channel. Thinking about this was profoundly inflected by the large lobby for advertising on TV, which had seen the success of commercial TV in the USA. Others saw the *problems* of commercial TV from the same model; but the eventual constitution of a commercial broadcasting organisation received support from the Left as well as Right—largely in the hope that it would break the monopoly of the BBC and lead to real innovation in the kinds of programmes available. The initial model of commercial TV in Britain bears the imprint of this bi-partisan development. It had two basic principles: that a regulatory body should award contracts to *regional* contractors rather than a single national body; and that finance for the whole operation should come from the sale of advertising space separate from the programmes. These were decent enough principles, learned from the major problems of commercial TV in the USA, but they lacked a realistic financial perspective. So the state's piecemeal solution to the BBC's national monopoly position created major problems: ones which have since become common in the constitution of commercial TV broadcasting.

The regional contractors had high initial costs: the Independent Television Authority, then the regulatory body, provided transmitters, but they had to provide everything else. And the initial costs of actually providing programmes was greater than expected, especially if a large amount of regionally-made material was used, as was initially planned. And, for all the advertising industry's enthusiasm for commercial TV, initial income from advertising was less than projected. After 18 months of operation, some contractors were facing bankruptcy. So the ITA permitted major variations in the mode of operation of the regional companies. They were allowed to form what amounted to a network, with each

regional company providing a proportion of the programmes to be shown by all at the same time on the same night at peak hours. Even more extreme, the contractor for the North East, Granada, was permitted to farm out its entire programming to the Midland regional contractor, ATV. Secondly, the rules about advertising were relaxed, so that programmes of paid promotional material could appear (later they were abolished). Thirdly, the number of game-shows with prizes was increased. So the regulatory body compromised in three areas: advertising, programme content, and the regional nature of the system they were policing.

Three years later, a rather incautious Lord Thompson, the press baron who controlled a minor franchise in lowland Scotland, likened a commercial TV franchise to a 'licence to print money'. Yet the ITA were unable to make up the ground they had lost. The major British commercial TV channel is still a national network first, with only minor regional input. The state did not insist on a return to a genuinely regional TV; instead it imposed a levy for 'excess profits' on regional ITV contractors, a levy that is still in force today: the companies effectively pay for their licence to broadcast in proportion to their commercial success.

The lesson of this episode is that of the costs involved in starting up any new commercial broadcasting operation. The costs are greater than initially appear, and a cash flow crisis is likely to occur after the first year's operation. This is simply because the revenue from advertising is difficult to predict during the period that it takes advertising agencies and their clients to learn how to use the new medium: and for that medium to learn how to deal with them. The ITA (now IBA) should have foreseen this as a rule governing *all* expansions of commercial broadcasting, and not just the ground-breaking ones. But as the next expansion of the early 1980s demonstrates, they did not.

Two expansions of British commercial broadcasting were canvassed in the 1970s, and introduced in the 1980s. First, an expansion of the existing channel to broadcast in the mornings: 'Breakfast TV'. Second, an entirely new commercial channel, which by wide consent would act as a 'publisher' of programmes commissioned from independent suppliers (as recommended by the Annan Committee which inquired on the subject). Breakfast television (opened in Spring 1983) was a single national franchise given to a company, TV-AM, which promised extensive news coverage. Three years later, we have an atrophied news coverage and some very down-market entertainment and chat, provided by what is nominally the same company, though its ownership has changed significantly and every single one of its original executives has departed. The reason is simple enough: the company was dangerously undercapitalised, so it could not bear the large-scale losses it incurred in its first two and a half years of broadcasting. Both in constructing its own studio, and in its original staffing levels, the company was too ambitious. The IBA should have realised that the provision for start-up costs was inadequate; but if they did, they chose to do nothing about it. The final blow (which again should have been foreseen) was that the BBC opened its own rival

Breakfast TV service, using existing resources, some few weeks before its commercial rival. The BBC's service drew larger audiences initially, and under these circumstances, advertisers were unwilling to use TV-AM as an outlet. TV-AM is now commercially viable—at the cost of having completely changed its style, content and staff.

TV-AM demonstrates the incompetence of the IBA as a regulatory body. The Authority has acquiesced in every change to the form and content of the Breakfast TV service. The IBA should have recognised the undercapitalisation of TV-AM as a company, and, crucially, should have foreseen the possibility of competition from the BBC. Theirs is a case of complacency; but the further lesson to be learned for future state intervention in broadcasting is that start-up costs are an even more crucial issue with increasing competitive tendencies in broadcasting. The original constitution of ITV caught the BBC unawares: the BBC's service changed slowly to respond to the new audience tastes and new broadcasting assumptions about the audience that ITV revealed. But with TV-AM, the BBC responded as a competitor... and succeeded. However, the competition involved was harmful in its effects, reducing one potential news-at-breakfast channel to two chat-at-breakfast options.

The state operated differently with Channel 4. One of the most amazing features of the Channel's constitution (with hindsight) is that it was produced by Conservative legislation. A long history of lobbying, a heavyweight report from the Annan Committee, and, above all, the existing example of BBC 2 as a minority channel successfully running since the late '60s—all these currents contributed to the eventual legislation for the Fourth Channel. In other words, the legislation was a work of consensus politics, inflected by Tory ideology but not born of it. Nowadays, Thatcherism would ignore all influences except those from its own camp: had Channel 4 been set up only a couple of years later, the results would have been different indeed. As it was, the Channel was set up to be a publisher of programmes (*pace* Annan), rather than 100 per cent from non-franchise holders.

The chief advance in state thinking was around the brief of the Channel: according to the Act, it was to be devoted to 'innovation and experiment', an odd stipulation for a commercial channel, and an even odder one for a piece of Conservative legislation. Nevertheless, the IBA recognised that a different channel to its existing ITV was to be created as a result of the Act, and that therefore financial provision should be made for the inevitable losses that would be incurred in the first years of operation. Hence the ingenious system of a levy on the regional ITV contractors, in return for the right to sell Channel 4 advertising space in their region. This system is not without benefits for the ITV contractors: their subscription to Channel 4 reduces their liability for excess profits tax, and they can begin to turn a profit when advertising revenue increases. And since they provide 50 per cent of Channel 4's programmes, their under-used staff and facilities are better employed. It is a system, in short, that has allowed a progressive and even controversial minority TV channel to be launched as a channel carrying advertising (and aiming, in

the longer term, to be supported from advertising).

This, then, is the current structure of British broadcasting: four channels, two commercial, two directly state-owned, none truly private. The state has played a central role in developing this structure, more by luck than by judgment, it seems. The main lessons to be learnt from the British experience are these:

- 1) The 'arm's length' principle of state control has many advantages in the day-to-day operation of broadcasting (a relative freedom from political interference except in times of crisis), but it also has distinct disadvantages. The initial design that government legislation provides is often changed radically when broadcasting begins. The internal complacency of any sector of broadcasting can only be changed by addition of new broadcasting outlets rather than by direct intervention. The controlling bodies (especially the IBA) confine themselves to tinkering with the system on a day-to-day basis, and do not insist that changes in working practices brought about by temporary expediencies are later corrected.
- 2) State thinking about broadcasting does not seem to involve sufficient economic calculation. In particular, the set-up costs of any new broadcasting expansion seem to be drastically underestimated. This forces an emergency which can only be dealt with by abandoning social and cultural considerations in the face of the short-term demands of the market.
- 3) With the exception of Channel 4, state broadcasting policies have integrated the functions of programme production into the same organisation as those of broadcasting and overall editorial control. The monolithic structures thus set up (whether BBC or ITV companies) then become quite conservative and complacent, making the introduction of new ideas, new personnel and new working practices very difficult.
- 4) State policy has been dominated by piecemeal thinking, using the expansion of broadcasting as the means of 'adding on' a corrective to the perceived problems of the existing system. In these circumstances, the debate about the existing problems of broadcasting can be easily swayed. Indeed, the debate around the constitution of ITV as a commercial channel in the mid-1950s was the first time in British politics that large-scale commercial lobbying took place: advertising agencies and large consumer-goods corporations were able to create a climate of opinion favourable to an advert-supported channel rather than any other.

II

Recent Conservative policy decisions have exacerbated these problems of British state approaches to broadcasting. Under the banner of deregulation, both cable and satellite broadcasting have been left to the whim of market forces. The state has been left with no real role, apart from that of specifying the kinds of technologies to be used. However, deregulation has its limits in the Tory mind: although the complex apparatus of rules and understandings about cultural priorities has not been transferred from the existing broadcasting sphere, one obsession still resists the re-

lentless drive towards deregulation. The threat of obscenity still has to be repulsed, and suitable restrictions have been built into the cable legislation. Direct satellite broadcasting will be more difficult to control, but currently pending legislation (the Churchill Bill to extend the Obscene Publications Act to broadcasting) would provide some kind of legislative purchase on the activity of satellite channels.

But the Tory attitude to cultural politics stops once the fear of obscenity has been placated. Technology and control are the areas where the Tory version of the state thinks itself able to intervene. So local authorities have been excluded from participation in local cable enterprises; and private capitals—Thorn EMI, etc—have been left to fund cable provision from their own resources. This can only be explained by the fact that the government did not perceive cable as a cultural or entertainment resource. Rather, they regarded the laying of high-quality cable transmission networks as a priority for the future development of business: towards information technology in the home. They wanted entertainment to lead cable to people's houses so that they would be ready for home banking, home shopping, etc. Hence the government's insistence on high technical standards and private ownership under licence. In the event, the old problem of start-up costs has again become crucial: private corporations are not willing to invest the vast sums needed to provide fibre-optic cables for all the cities' streets. Cable TV is an outstanding example of the failure of free market policies: a social and infrastructural need was perceived by the state, and a formal structure was devised to encourage private capital to fill that need. Very little, if anything, has come of it.

However, the current government has tried on a number of occasions to interfere directly in the details of broadcasting content elsewhere. In one notorious case, in 1985 the then Home Secretary, Leon Brittan (responsible for broadcasting) wrote to the BBC Governors asking that they withdraw *At the Edge of the Union*, a scheduled documentary featuring a Sinn Féin politician¹. Leon Brittan made his letter public. The Governors considered the matter . . . and agreed. An avalanche of protest followed, with the predictable face-saving climb-down by the BBC Governors. But the damage was done: the nominally independent Board had been so stuffed with Thatcherite political appointees that it had given way to the most inept piece of political pressure that British broadcasting had ever experienced. The principle of 'arm's length' control of broadcasting had been breached for the first time outside a political crisis.

So the Conservative government has eroded existing state policies in two areas. With new broadcasting media (especially cable), they have excluded positive cultural considerations from the remit of the state; and in their dealings with the existing broadcasting sector, they have abandoned the traditional 'even-handed' approach of past governments in favour of brutal political manipulation, first by appointing their supporters to the independent controlling bodies, and then by demanding publicly that they should do what the governing party demands. Their third

¹ See Liz Curtis, 'British Broadcasting and Ireland', *Screen* March-April 1986, vol 27 no 2, p 47.

initiative was to try to change the funding arrangements for the BBC from the licence fee system to an advertising-based BBC. This would reduce the current (slim) degree of diversity in broadcasting funding in Britain to a single source of revenue. In the event, only the advertising industry itself seems to favour this option (since it would inevitably drive down advertising rates on TV), and it is expected that the idea will quietly disappear as impractical. Even so, the cumulative effect of Thatcherism on broadcasting has been to edge it towards an unproductive crisis, where existing broadcasting institutions are destabilised, and new developments are left with no effective economic regulation.

Conservative policies have advanced and deepened an existing crisis in state attitudes towards broadcasting brought about by the expansion of broadcasting opportunities. Since these opportunities are unclear, involving new technologies, large capital investments and a drastic expansion in the volume of programme material needed, the idea of 'deregulation' appears attractive. However, the expansion we are facing will still leave broadcasting as a scarce and largely unavailable resource: something to be received and consumed as entertainment (with some information) by the vast majority of the population, rather than to be used by them. The size of investments needed to set up new broadcast channels will dictate a maximisation of audience for a long time to come, until the technology is mature and the initial capitalisation has been amortised. In such a situation, where expansion will only multiply existing forms rather than alter them, the state still has a valuable role to play in countervailing the forces of the market. The state has to adopt policies appropriate to a modern democracy in dealing with the scarce resources of broadcasting. Hence the rest of this article is devoted to sketching some policy priorities, ones which acknowledge that the plurality of voices in our culture is an unequal plurality, and thus that state policies should be weighted in favour of the weak.

III

Such policies should be detailed in three connected areas: culture, structure and funding. In each, the tendency must be to promote pluralism. Broadcasting may be a scarce and valuable resource, but it does not follow that it should be exclusively assigned to the few, nor dominated by the administrative elegance of single streamlined structures. This need not imply the introduction of muddle and chaos (because they are themselves powerful instruments of control), but it does imply a devolved rather than a centralised structure, and one that is not easily susceptible to political control or financial blackmail from any one source.

Cultural policies towards broadcasting should promote tendencies which move away from the creation of a mass culture, towards a more federal or fragmented culture. Differences between individuals and between social groups should be both celebrated and understood, rather than played down in the interests of social harmony or audience maxi-

sation. British TV tends to equate these two aims of harmony and audience size: it's a convenient attitude for all concerned. But the result has been to confine to the margins, or even exclude completely the voices of the poorer, weaker and culturally distinctive sections of British society. Despite the existence of certain programmes geared towards the black communities, we still have a scarcity of black characters in drama. American imported series, formed with a policy of positive discrimination, provide black characters in substantial numbers, and are a stark contrast to British produced drama. On British TV, blacks are largely relegated to news and documentary: as a result, they are in danger of being seen as 'social problems'. Though programmes for the black audience (one pioneered by Channel 4 and subsequently taken up by BBC 2) are a significant innovation, on their own they are not enough. A duty to deal with ethnic minorities and their cultures is the statutory minimum that should be imposed by the state on its broadcasting organisations; a wider framing of legislation on this question is needed. This would encourage positive discrimination in casting drama, and discourage the presentation of ethnic communities as outsiders or social problems.

The example of the small advance of British broadcasting in the area of ethnic minorities should not blind us to the weird way that it still refuses to address substantial (and not always minority) groups within the community. We have no TV programme specifically for women, or for particular kinds of women. For some reason I cannot understand, it is considered to be a 'controversial' question, even though *Woman's Hour* is about to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary on BBC radio. Similarly, we have over four million unemployed people in Britain, and many are of necessity heavy TV viewers. But we have no programme that addresses itself to the unemployed specifically, and very little drama which takes the problems and possibilities of joblessness as its central theme. With the unemployed, perhaps commercial reasons have some influence, since the unemployed are not great consumers as a rule. But the real reason, as the example of the vast unaddressed audience of women shows us, is that TV is unwilling to consider the idea of talking to a fraction of the population rather than potentially the whole population. Such an attitude makes the promotion, celebration and understanding of cultural differences a very difficult task. The state has a duty to counteract television's tendency, as a scarce medium, to try to address all of the people all of the time.

The Dutch broadcasting system provides an example of a system that promotes diversity. The criticism often levelled at it, that its diversity is a source of weakness not strength, merely applies to the current system of two Dutch domestic channels. Arguably, the Dutch system would become stronger with a multiplication of channels. Currently, nine separate production companies provide programming into the two channels. One is a central news and programme acquisition service, the other eight are organisations linked to the main political, religious and cultural tendencies in Dutch society. Broadcasting time, licence and advertising revenue are all allocated on the basis of the size of membership of the

organisation. The organisations vary from Catholic, Protestant and Evangelical to a former pirate station. The pressures of maintaining a membership allied to a political or social outlook who are also looking for 'entertainment' has produced a drift away from the initial intentions of the broadcasting groups. However, the basic system of diversity linked to a membership system to support it does produce a diversity of approaches to political and social affairs, *all of which are explicit*. One of the major problems with TV in most countries is that news is constructed on a unified basis: it claims to be 'objective' (although much is recycled government press releases), and in fact becomes news from the political centre as a result.

Diversity is a cultural policy that should equally be applied to imported material. There is no point in fostering a recognition of cultural richness and difference within the boundaries of the nation-state if imported material comes almost exclusively from one source. The current situation in Britain is that economic considerations have dictated a policy on imports that has doubtful cultural results. The major broadcasting unions have an informal but effective arrangement that British TV should show only 15 per cent imported material, excluding cinema films. In principle, each domestic industry should have some kind of protectionist measure like this, since it is TV's rule of thumb that 'production is expensive, purchases are cheap'. But the British system, for all its informality, has a serious flaw. Since it considers all imports alike, it means that the quota is effectively used up on US material. We have little from Europe, virtually nothing from the Third World. The obvious solution (proposed once by Jack Lang, the French Minister of Culture) is to add a positive action element to the quota system, stipulating percentages of material from different parts of the world (so much from South America; a mandatory purchase from Africa; definitely only this much from North America). The percentages should be open to adjustment, but the incentive would be on actually obtaining material from those parts of the world whose images we never see outside news reports.

A further facet of promoting cultural diversity concerns the regulation and censorship of broadcasting. The current system in Britain relies on the regulatory organisations seizing upon and banning or cutting programmes which are made at the 'outer limits' of what is acceptable in their eyes. The result is that the broad range of broadcasting is not regulated. Objections are raised from a variety of sources to many of the routine broadcast images. There is still an appalling level of racism and of insult to women in many so-called comedy shows. There is concern from the Right about what is called 'violence' and 'sexual promiscuity'. There is feminist concern about violence directed towards women, and about violence presented as a major and desirable facet of masculinity. These complaints have left the regulatory bodies at something of a loss: they have proposed inquiries and investigations, but nothing else. Meanwhile, they continue to maintain ill-defined bounds over which broadcasters must not step. The situation is topsy-turvy. Regulation of broadcasting implies a regulation of the whole of broadcasting rather than its

limit-cases. In these circumstances, the regulators would have to be responsive to a continuing public debate about programme standards, a debate initiated by them. The question of limit-cases would then become much less important, freeing some broadcasters to carry on innovatory work in areas where TV has refused to tread, without, for all that, allowing blatantly exploitative work to be made or broadcast. Regulation must be democratic and concerned with the whole of the output. Any other system discourages diversity in broadcasting.

Cultural diversity has to be underpinned by a similar principle in the *structure* of broadcasting, as the example of Holland has already made clear. Channel 4 in Britain has also shown that broadcasting need not be undertaken by a monolithic corporation. Other broadcasting set-ups give similar examples. The West German system (initiated by the British occupying forces) is regional (as British ITV failed to be) and takes a considerable amount of product from independent producers (and has done for many more years than Channel 4 has been in business). Even the US broadcasting system consists of local stations affiliated to networks rather than any national monolith.

However, it is a peculiarity of nation states that they conceive their broadcasting according to their own ideal self-image. Where a state is trying to unify and control (albeit democratically) the activities within its borders, then it conceives broadcasting as a unified and controllable activity to which the model of the vertically integrated corporation seems appropriate. Hence the BBC, commissioning programmes from itself, which it then broadcasts; a model similar to that of many other states. But this vertical integration of the editorial, production and broadcasting aspects of TV is by no means necessary. Channel 4 has demonstrated that production can be separated, and in many (but not all) cases can bring great cost and editorial benefits. Channel 4 commissions programmes and approves budgets, monitors the progress of productions relatively closely, but it can only exert an overall and vague control that still leaves a degree of operational flexibility for the actual producers.

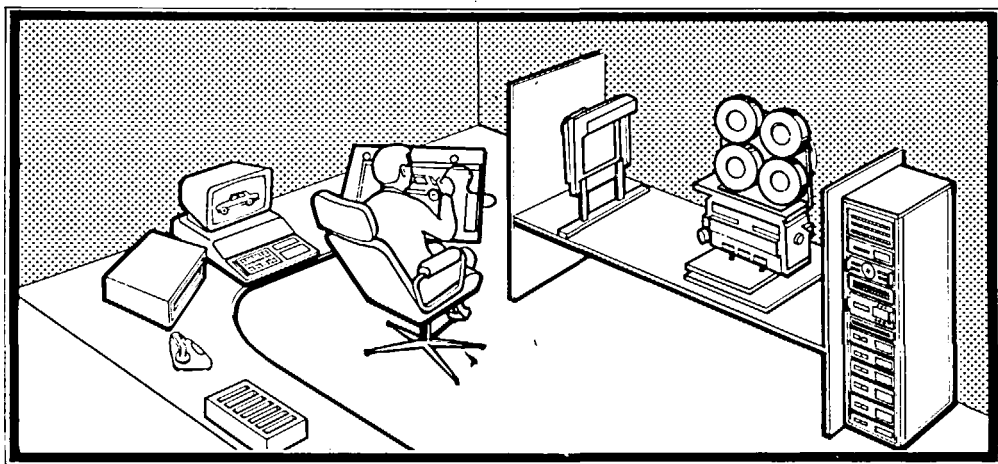
The advantage of such a model is that the management of the architecture of broadcasting—scheduling, planning, overall cost control and basic editorial decisions—are the responsibility of one organisation, but the detailed editorial decisions and financial decisions are in the hands of a large number of differently constituted companies. Hence decision points are multiplied, and multiplied beyond a pyramidal structure of management which is inevitable in a single organisation. Multiple decision points means that decisions are very much more difficult to control from the centre. There is rather more room for individual initiative and for more adventurous approaches. Of course, the system has its drawbacks, and many British independent producers see starvation around the corner if they do not continue to get broadcasting work.

The system of commissioning from independents provides, in principle at least, a greater degree of pluralism in the broadcasting output. It allows for a rather greater degree of openness to new ideas, since there is rather less opportunity for complacency and ossification

than is provided by a large organisation. Equally, there is a rather greater degree of interchange with people working in other media (journalism, theatre, cinema, publishing) than is provided by a monolithic broadcasting organisation whose ways are inevitably rather mysterious to outsiders.

But such a system also has its disadvantages: the inevitable instability of independent production companies makes for a rather ruthless pursuit of profit at times; and the experience of Channel 4 has shown that the provision of equipment hardware in independent facility companies constitutes a large (and sometimes very profitable) expansion. Video technology is very expensive, and the kinds of companies formed in this area are a stark contrast to the independent production companies. A new, and relatively unforeseen, financial nexus has been formed in the technical facility sector. Channel 4 has no formal relation with this sector except the purely market one of providing a large proportion of the production work that they undertake (excluding the other staples of commercials and music videos). In the British situation, the rapid expansion of this sector has meant a real competition between different organisations, but already take-overs are occurring, and one new giant has even made a take-over bid for one of the ITV regional contractors. There is little point in promoting diversity at the level of programme production, only to find that there is little diversity at the level of technical facilities. For facilities can be managed and packaged in a variety of different ways, some of which are completely inappropriate for some individual producers or kinds of programmes.

A simple illustration of this comes from television history: the initial large-scale investment in studios still makes its mark on much TV output, which is still staged in some electronic limbo. One of the more satisfying achievements of Channel 4 has been to reduce the dependence on the standard studio-presentation format. Studios are just too expens-

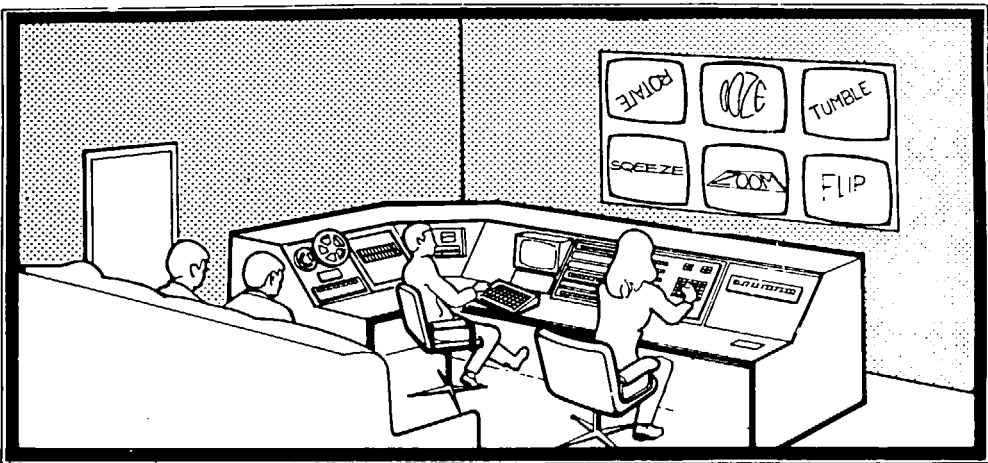


The new financial nexus of Channel 4's 'independent' facility sector...

ive to hire for such purposes, so a number of programmes have adopted different presentational procedures.

A pyramidal broadcasting monolith tends to be secretive about its internal workings, but when production is separated from the management of broadcasting, the flow of information between the two sectors has to become reasonably public. Information about editorial plans and priorities should be made public so that each individual producer can keep informed. In practice, Channel 4 at least has not learnt this lesson, and has been extensively criticised as a result. A valuable opportunity for public scrutiny of a broadcasting organisation has been lost as a result; and there is a lingering suspicion that work has sometimes been gained through information gleaned from being in the right place at the right time. Nevertheless, such problems come from the real difficulties of adjustment that Channel 4 has demanded of British broadcasting: not the least of these is one of broadcasting management finding themselves open to relatively public criticism from producers—and from the press with whom producers talk. Such things never happen at the BBC, since Channel 4 still remains the only broadcasting market for independent producers. But after three years of the Channel, there is now a considerable degree of pressure on the ITV and BBC to commission some of their output from independent producers. Channel 4's monopoly of independent work can be considered a temporary phenomenon. Once the BBC and ITV take a considerable amount of out-of-house product, the consequences for British broadcasting will be great—and probably beneficial to the variety of voices on TV.

Finally, diversity is a principle that should be applied to the *funding* structure of broadcasting. There are three current methods in operation around the world. One is funding directly from the state (with the direct political control of broadcasting that this implies) or the more indirect method of the licence fee, which in Britain funds the BBC. Every TV



... left, computer graphics input and above, digital effects suite at London's Moving Picture Company.

used has to have a licence, the price of the licence is set by the government, and it is collected by state organisations. Hence the government still has a financial lever on the BBC (one that has been used by the current government) – of refusing to increase the licence fee. The second method of funding is through the sale of advertising time, revenue from which is meant to pay for the rest of TV's output – though, as we've seen, there are liable to be large initial losses in getting the system to operate as intended. The third system is one tied to the audience's actual use of a particular TV service, either by subscription in the case of closed cable or encoded satellite systems, or by direct (tax-deductable) donations, as with smaller stations in the USA. It's rare to find a broadcasting structure that integrates all three of these funding means. If political independence can be fostered by funding diversity, it would be ideal to propose a broadcasting structure which would be funded part by state revenue on a quasi-automatic basis; part by income from advertising; and part from a contribution directly from viewers in proportion to their use of the service. However, despite the Dutch example, there are insuperable problems with the third, since it is almost impossible to gauge the use of TV in the same way as the use of gas or electricity. And even were that possible, it would still be desirable to gauge the degree of pleasure gained

In Britain it can be argued that the BBC's lack of advertising puts a premium on the available space on the other two channels, so that the BBC's income should be related in some way to the income of the commercial system. This would seem feasible since the state still collects an amount of excess profits tax on the ITV franchise-holders' operations. Perhaps this money should be incorporated into the BBC's funding? The intimate connections in this area should at least be recognised so that the level of the license fee is related to the amount that the ITV franchise holders contribute as excess profits to the state. This would ease the BBC's current dependence on the government setting the level of the licence fee.

Advertising itself is a complicated area. There are two forms of advertising on British TV. The recognised form of 'spot' advertising consists of a group of 30 second (or longer) short advertisements in groups every 15 minutes or so, interrupting programmes. The less recognised form is of sponsorship of programmes themselves or of events (often sporting events) which are televised, and the similar system of 'product placement', making sure that characters in fiction use certain brands (of cars, furnishings, clothes) rather than others.

Spot advertising has advantages as well as disadvantages. The British system allows the insertion of advertising breaks within programmes, at 15 minute intervals. These provide handy pauses to 'make a cup of tea' or conduct other domestic activities. Viewers' attention to TV tends to be discontinuous, so it can be argued that spot advertising *helps* producers by pacing their programmes for the audience. On the other hand, advertising spots can disrupt the mood of a programme, or appear totally objectionable alongside, for instance, news images of famine (but

perhaps this juxtapositioning is a good thing too). Spot advertising quickly creates a contract with viewers, who recognise its place as different from the programmes, and helpful in their viewing (or rather, non-viewing) habits. Spot advertisements, too, by their repetition, can be more complex and more innovatory (particularly in graphics) than a programme destined to be seen once or twice only. Spot advertising tends to influence the styles adopted by programmes and much television humour.

Above all, spot advertising, as long as it is marked as separate from the programme, is *explicitly* advertising. This is not so with the second form of advertising on TV. This is the covert advertising that is becoming more prevalent. Everyone is familiar with the hoardings that appear around the grounds of televised sports. But we are not so aware of 'product placing': the mechanism by which agencies ensure that particular kinds of cars, furnishings, clothes, locations are used in major US series. US broadcasting rules require an acknowledgment that such-and-such a company has provided cars or clothes, etc. But now that series like *Dynasty* and *Dallas* appear all over Europe, the agency that used to deal with tie-in marketing (of *Dallas* tee-shirts for instance) now operates more in the area of product placement, making sure that European market products are used in the series. Money must change hands in this arrangement, but it is an unacknowledged arrangement, as many transnational tie-ups are. Such advertising, of course, does not provide any income to the transmitting organisation at all. And that revenue question is a problem; just as the use of such promotion is suspect because it does not declare its identity as advertising to the audience.

Sponsorship is an extension of this principle, one that British commercial TV is beginning to enter. Channel 4 producers are now being encouraged to seek corporate sponsorship for their programmes. Sometimes, for instance with a series about *The Countryside*, corporate sponsors are interested only in promoting their company image (in this case, a building society). In other cases, problems of editorial control inevitably loom. Since sponsorship is being explored as a means of boosting production budgets, it causes long-term structural difficulties for the TV organisation indulging in it. Even though a steadfast refusal to accept projects because of their sponsorship potential can be maintained without difficulty, it is still difficult to see how the existence of sponsorship in boosting the income of the TV channel can help unsponsored programmes. For it is likely that producers able to raise sponsorship will want to increase their budget with that money, rather than allow it to release funds for other productions. Sponsorship has superficial attraction for broadcasting, but it inevitably implies a blurring of the separation that should exist between advertising and programmes in any socially responsible TV station. It certainly makes the task of diversifying the funding sources for broadcasting much more difficult. For as soon as advertising (in any form) enters into programmes, the argument for other forms of funding, whether direct from

viewers, or from the state, becomes much less tenable. Broadcasting under the licence of the state may never find itself in thrall to advertising interests to any dramatic level, but it's a principle of any organisation that it will avoid 'unnecessary' confrontation and conflict. Hence programmes on important social issues where advertisers' interests are at stake (the use of drugs in medicine, or additives in food) will become that much harder to mount on a routine basis. British TV has managed to resist this pressure rather more than pressure from governments. It remains a danger where broadcasting exists on advertising revenue alone. Hence editorial independence can be promoted by a diversity of funding sources.

I have tried to use a series of examples drawn from the patchy policies and activities of the British state to draw out a realistic state policy towards broadcasting. This centres on the principle of diversity. It seeks to promote cultural diversity and difference rather than the repetitions of a hegemonic culture. It seeks to underpin this cultural diversity with a pluralistic structure which attempts to distance the point of programme production from the overall running of broadcasting, rather than integrating the two functions into one organisation. It seeks to find funding in a diversity of sources wherever possible, but remains adamant that advertising revenue should be separate from the business of making programmes. All of these principles have had numerous advocates. I hope that by pointing out the interconnectedness of these principles to have added another: that the way broadcasting works should be explicit to its viewers, rather than hidden and obscure. Only then can broadcasting be made accountable to the public it serves, and to the state which (in theory) is the guardian of the public's varied interests. Until such a real public accountability is built into broadcasting, we will continue to see the best-laid schemes of the state laid waste by the short-term demands of the market.

This article was presented at a conference at the University of Oslo on 'The Mass Media and the Humanities', March 1986.

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THE PEACOCK DEBATE IN THE UK

BY STEVEN BARNETT AND DAVID
DOCHERTY

Inevitably, given its terms of reference, the official debate on financing the BBC has been conducted by the men in grey suits. Indeed the formulas being proposed as solutions for broadcasting seem to have come off the same peg as the suits. There have been a few stabs at putting the issues facing the Peacock Committee¹ in philosophical focus, most notably in the debate between Peter Jay and the BBC's Janet Morgan in the pages of *Televisual*², and the Broadcasting Research Unit's booklet *The Public Service Idea in British Broadcasting*³.

The lack of philosophical insight has allowed economic interests to define the positions taken in the various submissions to Peacock. Although the Committee has claimed a roughly equal balance between the pro- and anti-advertising submissions⁴, at least 90 per cent of the institutional submissions are opposed to advertising. The only institutional submissions which were pro-advertising came from the advertising lobbies, the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers (ISBA) and the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA), from a couple of major advertisers, notably the Mars group, and from the New Right research unit, the Adam Smith Institute⁵.

Most of the submissions to the Committee have been concerned with three main questions. The primary question concerns the size of the advertising cake: how much potential advertising revenue is there in the British economy, and how much can the BBC expect to take without plunging the ITV (Independent Television) and ILR (Independent Local Radio) companies into crisis. The second question concerns the organisational and aesthetic effects of advertising on the BBC. The third concerns the effect of the new technologies. Direct broadcast satellites and cable are explicitly mentioned in the brief to the

Committee, and while everyone seems to be aware that major changes will be taking place over the next five to ten years very few have addressed this problem in their submissions.

Initially the debate became bogged down in a plethora of economic detail. Each of the main protagonists commissioned its own economic experts and its own economic projections predicated on its own set of assumptions. Amazingly, each learned and objective economist produced detailed and unassailable evidence in support of his client's position. The result was a diminished reputation for economics as a discipline and reeling heads for those of us who attempted to unravel the conflicting equations.

The position of the advertising lobby is simple enough: there will be considerable growth in advertising revenue over the next decade which will leave the BBC's revenue further and further behind. According to Dick Johnson, the Chairman of ISBA's executive committee, the advertisers simply want to 'help the BBC avoid its inevitable plunge into a revenue crisis'.⁶ At the Peacock 'open' day in November (attended

¹ Officially, the Home Office Committee on Financing the BBC chaired by Professor Alan Peacock of Heriot-Watt University. It has been instructed to assess the effects of the introduction of advertising, sponsorship or income from the consumer other than the licence fee on the BBC and other British broadcasting institutions.

² 'Peter Jay's Challenge to Television', *Televisual*, August 1985. Janet Morgan, 'The BBC Replies', *Televisual*, November 1985.

³ The Broadcasting Research Unit, London, 1985.

⁴ Speech at AGM of the Voice of the Listener, October 21, 1985.

⁵ David Docherty and Janneatte Peasey, *Summary of Evidence to the Peacock Committee*, London, Broadcasting Research Unit, 1985.

⁶ Dick Johnson, 'Why Peacock Must Destroy BBC Myths', *Marketing Week*, November 8 1985.

only by invited guests) Johnson claimed that a BBC without advertising would be around one billion pounds behind the revenue of ITV and Channel 4 by 1991. For its own self-preservation, he submitted, the BBC would have to swallow its pride and take advertising.

The IPA broadly concurs with ISBA's views, although they have private reservations about ISBA's extrapolations. Their main points are: the licence fee is an unfair poll tax; more and more people are evading it and will continue to do so as it increases; it is an uncertain method of financing broadcasting given the onslaught of new technologies and continued battles with successive governments to raise the fee; and advertising can solve all these problems.

Unfortunately, the purity of the advertisers' arguments are compromised somewhat by their barely concealed ulterior motive – to dismantle the ITV monopoly of advertising air-time; their public statements need to be interpreted accordingly. Thus, according to Andrew Green of Saatchi and Saatchi the licence fee is 'unacceptable, unfair and unnecessary'.⁷ Translation: the ITV rate cards are unacceptable, unfair and unnecessary. Again, Dick Johnson suggests that advertisers 'want to see a healthy, albeit leaner and more efficient ITV'.⁸ Translation: they want to see the unions curbed, cost per thousand viewers reduced and the monopoly broken up. ISBA President Donald McLure was refreshingly honest at the start of the debate when he said 'the advertiser's view is quite straightforward. He's sick to death of having to pay more for his television airtime. He's fed up with being taken to the cleaners and will look sympathetically at any and all solutions which would promise even a minor ruffle of competition among the airwaves'.⁹

The advertising lobby's motives may not be altruistic but their position is a great deal more sophisticated than it appears. Not all advertisers are soap-powder manufacturers who want lowest common denominator broadcasting. Channel Four has taught British advertisers that the targeting of audience segments is an important tactic in an advertising campaign. Corporate or financial advertising clearly aimed at specialist markets is becoming prevalent; and the advertising lobby claim they want the BBC to maintain its diversity of programming so that the advertisers can buy the segmented audience.

According to Rodney Harris, the Prince of Darkness from the D'Arcy-Macmanus and Masius agency, 'advertisers pay for quality.... viewers want quality, variety and they want innovation. What satisfies viewers also satisfies advertisers'.¹⁰

Moreover, advertisers are not advocating the abolition of the licence fee in the short term. Advertising could not grow by 100 per cent in a year to compensate for the loss of licence fee revenue. They suggest that the licence fee should be pegged at £58 per year with advertising making up the difference between the BBC and ITV revenues.¹¹ In the long run, however, advertisers do envisage the licence fee being phased out altogether; this proposal is aired without any discussion of implications for the public service element of the BBC's Charter.

If the BBC continues to broadcast *Gardener's World* and *Question Time* because the advertisers want a segmented audience then, according to the advertisers, there is no difference between the forms of finance. This ignores the central point about a public broadcaster: that public broadcasting involves commitments from both government and population to the broadcaster, and accountability through Parliament to the population. The difference between the consumer and the citizen which is central to the British idea of public broadcasting is not addressed by the advertisers.

Broadcasters have also rushed to protect their vested interests with scant regard for the wider implications of Peacock's brief. As expected, the ITV companies and the BBC have been extolling the virtues of the broadcasting system in this country; both have rejected the break-up of ITV's advertising monopoly. According to the Independent Television Companies Association (ITCA), the present funding arrangement encourages high standards and real choice: with no major growth in ITV advertising expenditure, the BBC and ITV companies would be plunged

⁷ Speech at Manchester Symposium on Broadcasting, March 1986.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Presidential speech, October 1985.

¹⁰ *Broadcast*, August 23 1985.

¹¹ Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, submission to Peacock.

26 into a ratings war as both compete for the same source of revenue. This would not only drive standards down but also fundamentally change the present regional structure of the ITV system.¹²

Alan Budd, who is known to have influenced the government's monetarist policies, was hired by the ITCA companies to do their calculations. His conclusions were that: a) advertising on television tends to leave other forms of advertising unaffected, therefore the BBC's revenue from advertising would have to come from ITV's revenue; b) the large growth in ITV's revenues in the '80s has been the result of short term factors, noticeably the rise of colour television ownership which has encouraged advertisers to use television more; c) there is an inelasticity of demand in advertising which means that the more space there is available the cheaper advertising rates will have to be to fill it. This will mean a further reduction in ITV revenue.

The Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) and the ITCA companies have not been completely blinded by the numbers game; they have also raised the important point that Peacock should start by asking what television is for, rather than concentrating on how to pay for it. David Plowright of Granada recently re-stated this principle when he argued that 'our federal system may not be a model of cost-effectiveness in that it does duplicate manpower and resources, but it does give the regions of the UK a voice—not one available to them through the BBC—which is essentially a national service and less and less through the provincial press.'¹³ The advertisers claim they have no desire to upset the regional system; but they can hardly be unaware of the death sentence they will impose on some of the smaller regional stations (e.g., Border) if the BBC took advertising. They are also aware, contrary to their protestations, that Channel 4 would be badly affected if the ITV companies had to cut their suits out of a cheaper cloth.

Apart from the Conservatives the political parties unanimously reject advertising as a solution to the BBC's problems. The SDP suggest that the licence fee could be held steady for the next ten years if the BBC opted out of breakfast television. This is echoed by the Liberals, who are calling for the BBC to concentrate its services where they are most

needed. The Labour Party has stated publicly that if elected it will remove advertising from the BBC. In its submission it also proposed that the BBC should receive supplementary income from direct government grants, initially to subsidise the cost of the licence for the needy. It has also called for a wide-ranging inquiry into the future of broadcasting which would put the BBC's problems in a broader perspective. However, there are very few original ideas about the BBC (or broadcasting in general) emerging from the left—certainly nothing to match the radical ideas of restructuring the BBC which developed in the '70s.

The Conservatives are confronted with a dilemma. The free market thinking which dominates party policy leads inevitably to deregulation, advertising on BBC, and breaking up the ITV monopolies. Nevertheless, a one-nation philosophy still informs Conservative thinking, and with it the conviction that the BBC as a central institution should reflect that single nation. Although the free market approach reflects their economic policies, their cultural instincts would be offended by the range of material which would inevitably result from a genuine break-up of the monopolies. There is no evidence that the backbenchers are overwhelmingly committed to the idea of advertising on the BBC. Certainly Tim Brinton, the Chair of the Conservative Media Committee, has reversed his earlier opinions and come out firmly against advertising.¹⁴

One idea which has emerged strongly from the mainstream political parties is that the BBC should not be involved in several of its present operations. This opinion is shared by various vested interests who would stand to gain from such a policy—for example, the Local Radio Association wants the BBC out of local radio and the Association of Independent Producers want the BBC to take much more independent production.

On the economic front the advertisers have effectively lost their case. Recent speculation on

¹² See ITCA submissions to Peacock in the Broadcasting Research Unit, *Summary of Evidence to the Peacock Committee*, op cit.

¹³ Speech at Peacock Open Day, November 28 1985.

¹⁴ Personal interview.

the intentions of the Committee have ceased to focus on the advertising issue despite the clear limitations of the brief and have begun to look for other options that the Committee might recommend. As the in-fighting on the Committee begins to take shape, two options are being canvassed. The first option is a long-term one – namely subscription television. Peacock commissioned a paper on subscription which took the view that it was economically and technically feasible to scramble the BBC's signals and have them picked up by decoders.¹⁵ This option is gathering considerable support within the BBC as a long-term solution to its problems, but it would have to be coupled with special exemptions for pensioners and the unemployed if it is to conform to the essential public service principle of universal provision. If anyone who wants to watch cannot afford to do so then it will be difficult for the BBC to claim to be a genuinely national broadcaster.

The other option is that of the rump BBC, or the BBC in the mould of the US Public Broadcasting System (PBS).¹⁶ The assumption is that 'the BBC would concentrate much more on news, current affairs, and serious programming, leaving shows such as *Dallas* to ITV and cable and satellite stations'¹⁷. This option – which is probably monetarist financial columnist and Committee member Sam Brittan's brainchild – is the worst of all possible worlds: it would push the BBC to the margins of British broadcasting (and consequently British society) leaving the commercial stations to clean up on all forms of entertainment. Not only will this mean that Britain would lose the financial resources to produce comedy like *Monty Python*, *Fawlty Towers*, *Yes*, *Minister* and *Steptoe and Son*, but the high ratings which have traditionally validated the BBC and the licence fee would disappear. The result would be a vicious circle of low ratings, low investment and lack of morale resulting in a fundamental destabilising of the broadcasting system in this country.

CONCLUSION

Most people who have been involved with the current debate would agree on two points: a) Peacock is five or ten years too early and b) the Committee's brief is far too narrow. It is

interesting that the Committee is going to do the unthinkable and report early.¹⁸ This may suggest that the debate has not really been as wide-ranging as many would have hoped (though the more charitable may argue that the Committee have simply been diligent in their responsibilities). One pointer to the future, though, has been the encouragement given to former Ambassador to the US and TV-AM founder Peter Jay by several influential members of the committee. Jay's argument is that one cannot judge a broadcasting system to be 'good' by the traditional criteria of what it produces – by its ends; rather, we must judge a system by the level of access which it affords to the individual to make and choose the type of material which he or she wants to watch and listen to.

According to Jay we do not judge 'the rightness of democracy... by whether it produces "good" government as judged by the independent opinion of the educated classes'; he argues that democracy is right because of the process and not because of the government which it produces. Likewise Jay argues that the future wired city, in which choice and market forces would be paramount, would be right not because of the ends of the system, and certainly not because of an imposed sense of 'public service', but because it would enhance choice and individuality.

There are serious and unresolved difficulties with Jay's position. For example, cable will essentially be an urban phenomenon and (as Jay himself openly conceded at the Peacock open day) the maximum reach of a national grid will be 70 per cent of the population. Access to and choice of programmes will therefore be a function of where individuals live rather than an inalienable right. Furthermore, as Janet Morgan points out, production costs would tend to discourage truly democratic involvement in the process of making programmes.

¹⁵ Roger Bowles, Martin Cave, Peter Swann, 'An Economic Appraisal of Subscription Television: A Report for the Peacock Committee', 1985.

¹⁶ See Steven Barnett and David Docherty, *Broadcast*, March 14 1986.

¹⁷ *Financial Times*, March 6 1986.

¹⁸ The Report is scheduled for publication in July 1986.

28 Jay's argument is both tendentious and controversial, but it is one of the foundations for the neo-liberal attack on public service broadcasting. As the arguments about advertising recede for the present, different philosophical

convictions, encouraged by the development and increasing availability of the new technologies, will provide the framework for the real discussion about public service broadcasting. That debate is only beginning.

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BROADCASTING POLITICS: COMMUNICATIONS AND CONSUMPTION

BY KEVIN ROBINS AND FRANK
WEBSTER

¹ Julian Critchley (MP for Aldershot), *Hansard*, December 2, 1982, Col 445.

² Richard Hoggart, 'Must We Be Casualties in the TV Explosion?', *Guardian*, September 13, 1982.

THE TIME IS out of joint. Out of the so-called 'communications revolution' of the 1980s strange and anomalous political alliances have been spawned. Of paramount importance and influence, for the moment at least, is that powerful lobby which coheres around its condemnation of the BBC—and, indeed, the whole achievement of public service broadcasting in Britain—as paternalistic, elitist and even authoritarian. Dismissing the BBC as unresponsive to audience needs and tastes, as politically compromised, critics on the left and right of the political spectrum look, optimistically and enthusiastically, to the possibilities of 'electronic publishing' through the new media (cable, video, satellite, videotex). For many radical media workers and sociologists, as for neo-liberal celebrants of market forces (Adam Smith Institute, Institute of Economic Affairs), the future belongs to unregulated competition and market forces; the stuffy, bureaucratic ethos of the BBC is considered inimical to a vital, free and plural media culture. For both interest groupings the problem is 'statism' and 'collectivism' and the solution and way forward is entrepreneurship.

Ranged against this position is another unholy, yet less influential, alliance. It represents a point of view that is now commonly dismissed as residually and anachronistically ideological. This is a perspective that aligns, on the one hand, high Tories who 'do not believe in giving the people what they want' and who are 'sufficiently Reithian' to 'wish to see our broadcasting standards maintained'¹, and, on the other, more radical protagonists of cultural traditions who argue that 'one of the best internal achievements of this country in this century has been the invention and development of the idea of broadcasting in the public service'². The common factor is an Arnoldian conception of cultural values, and a strong faith in the BBC as a bastion against (American) commercial and market degradation of cultural standards.

Between these alternative positions there is no meaningful choice. The way forward to a democratic media and cultural policy for the 1990s is not at all clear. It is unfortunate and regrettable, then, that debate has

become polarised around these alternatives of commerce and entrepreneurship, on the one hand, and cultural paternalism and Reithian traditions on the other. Either commercial freedom and consumer sovereignty (the way of the future?) or a patrician and bureaucratic public service (nostalgia for the past?). Is this a real choice? If we are critical of the Reithian ethos of the BBC, can we only look to the alternatives of Rupert Murdoch and Ted Turner?

We are anxious here to avoid being trapped in this confining binary opposition. In our view, the issue has become too narrowly focused on media institutions and policies, and it is our intention, in this article, to broaden the debate by exploring some of the wider social and historical contexts within which the 'communications revolution' is taking place. We have chosen, particularly, to analyse the development and exploitation of television and post-television technologies within the historical development of consumer capitalism. From this perspective we are sceptical about those (thoroughly ahistorical) arguments which treat commercial broadcasting as a simple, unqualified liberation from the patrician traditions of the BBC. We find it difficult to accept 'actually existing' corporate interests as 'socially responsive and accountable', responsive and even progressive social forces³. This leads us to a position of qualified support for the BBC and public service broadcasting. This should not be misinterpreted as a conservative defence of cultural traditions. Our argument is that the values and achievements of public service broadcasting provide a better basis for the democratisation of mass media than do commercial interests. The objective of the current debate over the future of the BBC, we argue, should be to make the media accountable and responsive to social, not commercial, needs and priorities.

State, Market and Culture

At the heart of current debates on the future of the media is the relation of cultural forms to the state, on the one hand, and corporate and economic interests, on the other. For the purposes of our present argument, this issue can be translated into an exploration of the mechanics of social and political control: state and market, it can be argued, have operated as distinct and alternative forces for the incorporation and assimilation of those popular demands, which always exist as potentially destabilising and contestatory threats to the social order. It was the achievement of Keynesian social democracy, we suggest, to articulate and co-ordinate these two forms of social control. State management of housing, welfare, health and social security went hand in glove with mass consumption, consumerism and commodification of needs in the so-called 'affluent society'. What we are now experiencing, of course, is the (legitimation) crisis of this Keynesian historic compromise.

We can make our argument more concrete by outlining, albeit in

³ See Ian Connell, 'Commercial Broadcasting and the British Left', *Screen*, November-December 1983, vol 24 no 6, pp 70-80.

⁴ Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, p. 170.

⁵ See Helen E Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976.

⁶ Graham Murdock, 'Dilemmas of Radical Culture: Forms of Expression and Relations of Production', in Francis Barker *et al* (eds), 1936: *The Sociology of Literature*, vol 2, Colchester, University of Essex, 1979, p. 34.

⁷ Forsyth Hardy (ed), *Grierson on Documentary*, London, Faber and Faber, revised edition, 1966, p. 110, 139, 137.

⁸ William A Robson, 'The BBC as an Institution', *Political Quarterly*, vol 6 no 4, 1935, p. 473.

rather telegraphic form, the specific relation of culture/leisure to state and market. During the nineteenth century, under conditions of capitalist accumulation, working class leisure and popular cultural forms came increasingly to be seen as disruptive and anarchic; working class culture was treated as a social problem. A rational social and industrial order was considered to be threatened by the boisterous, gregarious, undisciplined and autonomous nature of popular pursuits: 'the corruptions of leisure threatened to undo the painstakingly fashioned bonds of a new work discipline in the labour force'⁴. One response to this problem was expressed through the initiatives of evangelical, municipal and philanthropic reformers. These various interventions—all moral, didactic and paternalist in their emphasis—sought to institute 'collective moral vigilance'. Sabbatarianism, temperance, public parks, mechanics' institutes, public libraries, all aimed to promote 'rational recreation' and a sense of order, propriety, decorum and social discipline. There was a strong belief, apparent in the writings of Matthew Arnold, in the need to shape culture as a socially cohesive force; the intention of moral reformers was to promote, through liberal cultural values, a sense of 'social citizenship'⁵.

The philanthropic basis of this reform movement provided, however, an uncertain and precarious basis for the rationalisation of culture and leisure activities. During the early twentieth century it was surpassed and subsumed by state paternalism and moral leadership on an extensive and concerted scale. Fundamental in this context were Reith's elaboration of public service broadcasting, and also Grierson's philosophy of documentary cinema, which, according to Graham Murdock, 'in its concept of responsibility, its stress on the communicator's educational role and its insistence on impartiality... comes very close to the ethos of public service broadcasting which Reith was then forging within the other great bastion of State sponsored communication, the BBC'⁶. Both maintain and develop a strongly Arnoldian conception of the importance of cultural values for maintaining social consensus and stability. The continuity with ideas of moral reform and social citizenship is apparent in Grierson's idea of documentary's mission to associate 'private effort with a sense of public purpose'; to give the individual 'a living conception of the community which he has the privilege to serve'; to promote 'a sense of active citizenship'; and to give 'a leadership of the imagination'. For Grierson, 'the State is the machinery by which the best interests of the people are secured'; it is the state's responsibility to ensure 'that measure of social control which social justice and the complexity of the modern world demand, and on which there can be no substantial argument as between political parties'⁷.

The same moral, consensual and propagandist emphasis is apparent in the Reithian conception of public service broadcasting. This phenomenon (philosophy and institution), regarded by one commentator as 'an invention in the sphere of social science no less remarkable than the invention of radio transmission in the sphere of natural science'⁸, emerged, in the 1920s, out of a Conservative/Labour alliance that was united

in its condemnation of the hucksterish and tawdry US commercial media, and its allegiance to the moral and educative cultural traditions of British society. This latter allegiance was particularly important to the strain of British Conservatism that held to an 'aristocratic' ideal of social organisation. It has often been remarked that this variant of Conservative philosophy- is distinguished by its stress on 'community', on 'one nation', in which inequalities are manifest but legitimated by the 'responsibilities' of the upper class. The essence of this ethos is that the privileged do not abuse their position by acting out of self-interest, but that they 'give' voluntarily in the spirit of *noblesse oblige*, for the common good⁹. But if the idea of 'public service' appealed to this Conservative point of view, it was also consonant with a Labour philosophy that was assuming strongly corporatist and paternalist dimensions in its opposition to private capital and *laissez-faire*. This Fabian perspective, too, approved the idea of a broadcasting corporation that would be morally serious, judicious and educative. Both Conservative and Labour positions must, in this respect, be seen within that English cultural outlook- found in both Matthew Arnold and William Morris- which opposed the ravages of industrial capitalism and insisted that culture must be distanced from commerce and dedicated to the tasks of discriminating, evaluating, informing and educating.

What is important is that the public service conception that evolved from these various intellectual and political traditions became the basis of the public sphere in Britain through to the 1970s. This social democratic (Keynesian) public space existed pre-eminently through the media of radio and television; it was the BBC that created the shared public space of citizenship. The space that was established, however, was in reality a pseudo-public sphere. Participation was vicarious and remote, with the citizen as spectator consuming images of the political process. Radio, and then television, represented- in both senses of that word- the political interests of social groups. Acting as the brokers and traffickers of public opinion, these broadcasting media established their own (mediated) community of para-social interaction. It was a process through which audiences were apparently unified around a spurious collective and national identity, while, in reality, they experienced an increasingly fragmented, privatised and serialised social existence.

If private, and then state, philanthropy and paternalism have functioned as a form of cultural control, then another powerful disciplinary force has been the market. It is this phenomenon that we examine in the main part of our article, so we shall only briefly contextualise our argument here. The commercialisation of popular culture began early in the nineteenth century, alongside philanthropy and moral reform, as an alternative mechanism for the ordering and rationalisation of working-class leisure¹⁰. With the development of the new electrical technologies that underpinned the culture and leisure industries of the early twentieth century, this process achieved a new momentum. Absolutely crucial here was the development of radio (and subsequently television), which transformed the revolution in mass

⁹ See Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980*, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

¹⁰ See Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure and the Industrial Revolution*, London, Croom Helm, 1980.

¹¹ Asa Briggs, *Mass Entertainment: The Origins of a Modern Industry* (29th Joseph Fisher Lecture in Commerce), Adelaide, Griffin Press, 1960, p. 30.

¹² See Jean Baudrillard, *La Société de Consommation*, Paris, Gallimard, 1978.

¹³ Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1976, p. 200.

¹⁴ Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen, *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1982.

¹⁵ Peter Conrad, *Television: The Medium and Its Manners*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982, pp. 121-122.

entertainment from being 'a revolution outside the home', to 'a revolution from within'¹¹. The real culmination and apotheosis of this tendency comes, however, in the period after the Second World War. In this Keynesian phase of capital accumulation, economic growth is centred upon the exploitation of wage good markets: leisure and entertainment goods proliferate along with other consumer durables (refrigerators, washing machines, cars, etc). This is a period of generalised consumer culture, a period in which the system of needs becomes subordinate to the system of objects¹². The very principle of democracy becomes associated here with market freedom and diversity, and with consumer sovereignty and equality.

Mass consumption becomes a crucial mechanism of social and cultural control, and working class 'free' time becomes subordinated to the 'leisure discipline' of consumerism. As Stuart Ewen has argued, the success of consumerism comes from its ability to link the market place 'to utopian ideals, to political and social freedom, to material well-being, and to the realization of fantasy'¹³. And fundamental, of course, to this apparatus for mediating social and cultural needs is television. One crucial function of the mass media has been, 'through the production and distribution of imagery, [to] have reconciled widespread vernacular demands for a better life with the general priorities of corporate capitalism'¹⁴. And television, particularly, has become the privileged means through which consumer capitalism enters our homes and our minds. As Peter Conrad writes:

*Television has lent itself so patiently to the uses of consumerism because the set itself is a trophy of consumerism... as well as a theatre for the cavorting of consumer durables on the game shows or in the ads. Watching television, we're dually customers, of the medium (as spectators) and of the goods it's displaying (as potential customers). The screen is a shop window, the box a warehouse.*¹⁵

Consumer Capitalism and Mass Communications

The twentieth century has seen the extensive and intensive rationalisation of social relations, and in this process the mass media have played an indispensable role. This process has occurred as a function of the logic of corporate capital and the market principles through which it operates; it has expressed the values, priorities and the power of capitalist commercial interests. We want now to explore the historical process through which television and other mass media have become implicated in this logic of rationalisation.

Our starting point is the development of manufacturing in the late nineteenth century beyond a point in which affairs could be organised adequately by personal supervision of the workforce. It is well known that F W Taylor's enunciation of Scientific Management was an effort to improve ways of controlling the process of production. Crucial to Taylorism was the principle that management should make its primary task

the precise monitoring of work required to produce a given article that it might be rigorously planned so as to be achievable with least cost and maximum efficiency. There are numerous variations of Taylorism as a practical strategy (time and motion, psychological appeal, etc), but all management since Taylor has adhered to his axial principles that surveillance and planning are the key requisites of work organisation.

These principles entailed that information (its collection, analysis and exploitation) should become crucial for modern management, an emphasis that was always motivated by the desire to gain ever more effective control over labour in the factory. Taylorism, in short, indicates the commencement of a process (that has never ceased) which marked the first genuine 'information revolution' brought about by expanding industrial enterprises in search of better organisation of production processes.¹⁶

Henry Ford, developing his pioneering automobile plant, complemented Taylor by placing knowledge of production in the machinery of his assembly line. Mechanisation, the characteristic feature of modern industrial production, should be viewed as the fruition of planning operations which have observed and even anticipated the labour process, 'cognised' the skills necessary to effect production, and incorporated these wherever possible into technologies. What became known as Fordism expresses 'technical control'¹⁷ of production, making it still more predictable, routine and planned. It continues to this day and has extended from the shopfloor into white collar and clerical work.

Taylor and Ford made information the prerequisite of effective planning and thereby of control of production within the plant, but other pressures meant that this search for control, and a vaunted role for information, would extend beyond these bounds. Not least was the pressure of corporations to integrate their production and distribution activities as they grew in size and scale of operation. A D Chandler describes how this gave rise to control within and without the factory by the 'visible hand' of what he calls 'managerial capitalism', the job of which is to co-ordinate and cohere manufacture and distribution. 'Managerial capitalism' brought about an end to the arbitrariness of the market in many spheres of corporate activity, replacing the unpredictability and inexactitude of procedure that accompanied reliance on the free market with proper planning of the best means for harmonising factory, warehouse and transportation.

In tandem with the coming of 'managerial capitalism' there developed what has been called the 'incorporation of America'¹⁸, the shaping of more and more spheres of life by corporate capitalism and the intrusion of market principles into social relationships, paving the way for the spread of consumerism, particularly in urban areas, at the expense of self-reliance, so that shop and store, rather than family and neighbours, became the source of everyday needs, and the ability to pay became the arbiter of their fulfilment.

As Scientific Management was introduced into factories, and while companies founded special management teams to integrate manufacture

¹⁶ On Taylorism see Stephen Hill, *Competition and Control at Work*, London, Heinemann, 1981.

¹⁷ See Richard Edwards, *Contested Terrain: the Transformations of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century*, London, Heinemann, 1979, ch 7.

¹⁸ Alfred D Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business*, Harvard University Press, 1977; Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1982, especially chs 3-4.

¹⁹ Herbert N Casson, *Ads and Sales: A Study of Advertising and Selling from the Standpoint of the New Principles of Scientific Management*, Chicago, A C McClurg and Co, 1911, p 7.

²⁰ See Daniel Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising*, New York, Basic Books, 1983.

²¹ See the interesting discussion in Michael Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society*, New York, Basic Books, 1984.

²² Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, London, Fontana, 1974, ch 1.

²³ Frank A Arnold, *Broadcast Advertising: The Fourth Dimension, Television Edition*, New York, Wiley and Sons, 1933, pp 41-42.

and distribution, the impulse to control beyond the work force and corporation through to the customer became more pressing. It was inevitable that Taylorist principles of calculation would extend to the crucial area of marketing and selling. Thus Herbert Casson, an early devotee, could argue that 'What has worked so well in the acquisition of knowledge and in the production of commodities may work just as well in the distribution of those commodities.'¹⁹ Moreover, there was the additional factor that mass production required 'efficient' mass consumption since efficiency and continuity of production could not be assured if consumption was left entirely to customer whim. For these reasons, by the second decade of the century, procedures were being developed to rationalise selling. The steady movement of clothing, cigarettes, processed foods, soaps and the like required the creation of ways of reaching customers, 'cognising' their needs and wants, and responding by persuasion and even redesigning products to make them more or newly attractive.²⁰

In a word, modern *marketing*²¹ began to be established – a concept that nominates and embraces the three activities of production, distribution and sales. Axiomatic to this principle was the systematic processing and dissemination of information wherever corporate imperatives so determined, in order that maximum control could be achieved. The need and imperative to gather, aggregate and accumulate information about the consumer led to the rise of market research (for demographic details, class distribution and characteristics, etc) and the accumulation of detailed sales records and analyses. It was also, of course, vital to convey information to the consumer and this gave rise most obviously and pre-eminently to advertising, though it was also evident in packaging, trade-in deals, credit schemes and various other means of more effectively persuading the public to spend.

We are by no means claiming that these attempts at organising and orchestrating the consumer have been entirely successful – people can be fickle and recalcitrant at the point of sale furthest away from corporate pressure – but these activities undertaken in pursuit of corporate interests have, we would argue, been fundamental constraints on twentieth century social and cultural life.

The development of broadcasting, and particularly television, has shaped, and been shaped by, these developments. It has, for example, been at the heart of that phenomenon of 'mobile privatisation' which Raymond Williams sees as characteristic of the way of life under consumer capitalism²². But perhaps the most fundamental contribution of broadcasting to mass consumption and the consumer ethos has been its proven ability as an advertising medium, its incomparable achievement in delivering advertising into the homes of potential customers. From the outset, astute marketers were aware that broadcasting was a fine way, second only to having a salesman physically present, of business 'entering the homes of the nation through doors and windows, no matter how tightly barred, and delivering its message audibly through the loudspeaker wherever placed'²³.



PHILCO TELEVISION

GIVES YOU AN ARMCHAIR VIEW

The privatisation of leisure: British advertisement for Philco television sets, circa 1950.

Much followed from capital's recognition that 'television is undoubtedly the greatest selling medium ever devised.'²⁴ There were obviously clear implications for the nature and range of programming, given that the major sources of television revenues were corporate enterprises and their advertising agencies.²⁵ Perhaps still more important, though clearly connected, was the fact that television's development as an agency for marketing the products and promoting the image and values of corporate capitalism led to an acute concern about who was receiving television programmes and which programme reached the largest audiences. In other words, the coming of television was accompanied by the rise of the ratings, which in turn came to exercise a dominant influence on the context of television.

Donald Hurwitz has situated the rise of audience research in the context of the overall development of US capitalism. His thesis is that

²⁴ Martin Meyer, *Madison Avenue U.S.A.: The Inside Story of American Advertising*, London, Bodley Head, 1958, p. 198.

²⁵ See Erik Barnouw, *The Sponsor: Notes on a Modern Potentate*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1978.

²⁶ Donald L. Hurwitz, *Broadcast 'Ratings': The Rise and Development of Commercial Audience Research and Measurement in American Broadcasting*, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Ph.D. thesis, 1983, Ann Arbor, MI 48106: University Microfilms International, p. 12.

²⁷ *ibid*, p. 204.

²⁸ See Erik Barnouw, *The Golden Web: A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Vol. 11 - 1933-1953*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1968; *The Image Empire: A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Vol. 111 - from 1953*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1970.

²⁹ See Kevin Robins and Frank Webster, 'The Revolution of the Fixed Wheel: Television and Social Taylorism', in Philip Drummond and Richard Paterson (eds), *Television in Transition*, London, British Film Institute, 1986.

³⁰ Toby Syfret, *Cable and Advertising in the Eighties*, J. Walter Thompson Co, 1983, p. 30.

from the outset in the USA 'broadcast institutions . . . became devices for organizing mass markets'²⁶, and that integral to this use of radio and television to boost corporate influence was accurate information about audiences. Hurwitz documents the rapid growth of increasingly sophisticated measures of audience activity (reliable survey methods, overnight ratings, computer analyses, prime-time categorisations, audimeter sets, etc), reminding us of the importance of detailed information for business planning. He also outlines the interconnected history of broadcast and social science research (here the biography of Frank Stanton, doctoral student and co-author with the doyen of quantitative sociology Paul Lazarsfeld, who also went on to become president of CBS, is illuminating). Strikingly, while considering the career of A C Neilson, Hurwitz observes that Neilson cast his market research company 'in the role of the Frederick Winslow Taylor of retailing and communications. Time-and-motion study was applied to the movement of products across grocers' shelves, and to the movement of viewers across broadcast advertisers' programs.'²⁷

This concern to watch, examine and monitor audiences is indicative of the impulse felt by corporate capital to harvest information so as to better manage its affairs. But the key role television played as an agency of marketing went beyond this to bear on the information it would disseminate. Most obviously, this took the form of advertising slots themselves, but the emphasis on ratings had a profound effect on the content of programmes. Bolstered by the authority and the democratic facade of accurate ratings ('the figures speak for themselves', 'the consumer is sovereign', 'we must give them what they want'), US television from the early days transmitted a relatively narrow range composed largely of fiction and light entertainment²⁸, resisting any argument that audiences might have other needs or programme makers other responsibilities.

If we have shown that the search to better operational control meant that corporate capital had an important influence on the early development of television, we must emphasise also that the search has continued to this day: in corporate advertising, advocacy advertising, sponsorship, public relations and the like.²⁹ Significantly, it has led to ready exploitation of the newest technologies for marketing and commercial purposes. Now, with the greater range and versatility of video, cable and satellite television, advertising and audience monitoring are rendered still more sophisticated. According to the J Walter Thompson Company, cable television offers 'new or improved advertising opportunities'³⁰: for example, test marketing, direct response advertising, placing of advertising within specialist channels, home shopping services, sponsorship, 'informercials'. What the new media allow is more advertising and more specific and targeted advertising to particular groups. And they also offer closer than ever surveillance and monitoring of the audience. Thus AGB, Britain's biggest market researcher, 'is already envisaging the day when the street interview, even telephone questioning, will be a thing of the past. Through its Cable and Viewdata company, it has a national

sample of 550 homes, which it quizzes through special viewdata sets. Apart from instant judgement on commercials, it can stretch into other media fields, like the respondents' magazine readership³¹. The same company's *Peoplemeter* has just been introduced into the United States as a means of more precisely surveying television viewing (meters can show when a set is switched on, *Peoplemeter* aims to discover whether viewers are actually watching).³² Seen in this light it is difficult not to think of the idea of public service broadcasting as an anomaly and an anachronism insofar as it appears to constrict the commercial strategies of corporate capitalism.

While corporate capital seeks to appropriate the new communications technologies to gain access to customers and consumers, it also has other uses for them. It is common knowledge that the advanced capitalist economies are dominated by (mainly US) transnational corporations. These corporations have expanded prodigiously to operate on a world scale, and this expansion has created a need for information and communications facilities to co-ordinate both inter- and intra-corporate transactions.³³ But it is not just the new communications that have been annexed by these corporate interests; television itself is also turned to new uses.

As transnational corporations have developed, they have used television for a number of purposes: as a means of stimulating sales, to advertise themselves as socially desirable or, at least, as socially innocuous, and to project consumption as a way of life.³⁴ And 'actually existing' television has invariably acted as an ally and support in the values it projects. Thus, a leading advertising agency could suggest that:

*The worldwide proliferation of the Marlboro brand would not have been possible without TV and motion picture education about the virile rugged character of the American West. . . . At the same time, TV programmes like 'Dallas' . . . have crossed many national boundaries to achieve world awareness for their plots, characters, etc.*³⁵

Today, Saatchi and Saatchi, one of the top half dozen world agencies, contends that the international scale of capitalism calls for 'pan-regional and world marketing . . . at the heart of business strategy' (combined with ever more carefully targeted—narrowcast—advertising via cable and video). This inevitably has major consequences for television, and the new technologies that enhance it, and, in this light, it is not surprising to learn that Saatchi and Saatchi is a leading opponent of continuance of the BBC's public service traditions, and a proponent of full-scale commercialisation of the British media.

And, because transnational capitalism necessarily conceives and conducts its affairs across national frontiers, it can exercise its influence in more forceful and effective ways than the direct lobbying of a given state. Thus, it is the case that, while the BBC may be able to campaign, with some success, to retain its mode of finance and its programme guidelines, the exploitation by foreign and transnational interests of

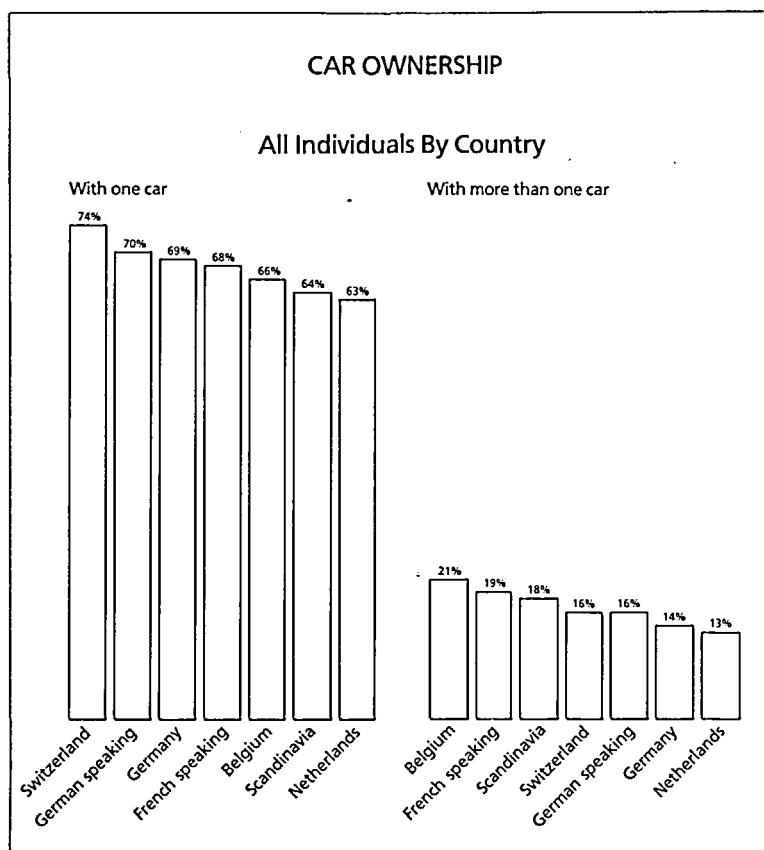
³¹ Anthony Thorncroft, 'Dawn of the Instant Reaction', *Financial Times*, March 28, 1985.

³² Jaclyn Fierman, 'Television Ratings', *Fortune*, April 1, 1985, p. 53.

³³ See Dan Schiller, *Telematics and Government*, Norwood, New Jersey, Ablex, 1982.

³⁴ Herb I Schiller, *Mass Communications and American Empire*, New York, A M Kelley, 1970.

³⁵ Saatchi and Saatchi Compton Worldwide, *Review of Operations*, December 8, 1983, p. 19.



Car ownership in Western Europe: data supplied to advertisers by Sky Channel.

direct broadcast satellite television, threatens to render a public service broadcasting system on a national scale obsolete and anachronistic. Across Europe a wave of developments, headed by Rupert Murdoch's Sky Channel, is bringing about 'Television Without Frontiers'³⁶. Once established these advertising, subscription and/or sponsor supported systems, which have an especial appeal for transnational marketing campaigns, may eat into audiences for indigenous services and make it difficult to defend broadcast systems paid for by a licence fee when only watched by a minority of viewers. In the longer term the future of any domestic public service broadcasting system would seem to depend more on the *Realpolitik* of multinational corporate interests, than on national legislation and policy decisions.

³⁶ EEC, *Television Without Frontiers*, Green Paper, 1984. See also Charles Dawson, 'TV Revolution: Why Admen Cannot Afford To Be Silent', *Campaign*, November 22, 1985, pp 50-53.

State, Market and the 'Communications Revolution'

We want now to turn to communications and broadcasting policy as it has developed over recent months (in the context of the 'communications revolution'). The first point that we would make here is that this

issue cannot be seriously addressed without a historical analysis of broadcasting's role in advanced capitalist societies. Within this article we have concentrated on the part played by broadcasting in the rationalisation and organisation of cultural life, and on its elaboration as a mechanism of legitimation. Radio and television have, we suggest, played a crucial control function over the past sixty years or so. And this function has assumed two quite distinct and separate forms. On the one hand, broadcasting media have played an indispensable and privileged role in the commercial colonisation of leisure; in the processes of marketing and the circulation of commodities; and in the growth of consumerism as an ideology and way of life. On the other, they have evolved out of paternalist and philanthropic traditions to 'serve' as a moral and educative social force, and as the basis of a social-democratic public sphere and consensual politics. Obviously the establishment of one or another (or a combination) of these forms in advanced capitalist societies has depended on specific national contexts. Thus, the political, cultural and economic climate of Britain nurtured, for a long time, a particular configuration of dominant public service tradition and subsidiary commercial system (strongly informed by public service ideals).

If one emphasis of this article is on the importance of historical analysis, then its other central argument is that the major issue is not simply and narrowly a question of broadcasting policy, but a matter of much broader processes and transformations. Here we have to take on board the significance of the new information and communications technologies, and, particularly, the context within which they are being developed and exploited. This, of course, is the crisis that has been affecting the advanced Western economies since the mid-seventies. This crisis, we must emphasise, has several dimensions. It is obviously, at one level, an economic crisis, and in this context the new technologies are the basis for a new cycle of accumulation and a new international division of labour. But it is also a crisis of legitimation, of political and cultural hegemony; it is a crisis of those social relations that have, in the post-war period, ensured (relatively) stable conditions for capital accumulation. And, at this level too, the new communications technologies play an important role.

In the British context, this crisis of hegemony is that of paternalist and statist 'moral leadership'. Those on the political Right are not alone in arguing that 'State ownership, State monopolies, State regulation and State planning, through the centralisation of economic power, inevitably lead to economic failure The fruits of centralised economic planning are corruption, poverty and servility.'³⁷ This concerted attack on the legitimating agencies of social democracy—the nationalised industries, the National Health Service, the state education system—also has its sights set on the tradition of public service broadcasting. There is a strong feeling that the BBC, in its present form at least, has outlived its usefulness (and even, as in the *Real Lives* debacle, become a positive nuisance). The Corporation, it is felt, no longer serves as a cohesive political force and a mechanism of social control. Real processes that

³⁷ Norman Tebbit, 'Old Values That Will Bolster a New Freedom', *Guardian*, November 15 1985.

have brought about social and political fragmentation have undermined the ideal (and ideology) of 'speaking to the nation'. The paternalist traditions of public service broadcasting, it is argued, have become sclerosed, bureaucratic and anachronistic. And, in the context of the exploitation of the new communications technologies by multinational capital, the BBC's comparatively agnostic attitude to the market and commercial forces seems to make it a positive liability.

What the new, lean and hungry, unregulated and deregulated communications seem to offer, and symbolise—in contrast to the lumbering dinosaur of public service broadcasting—is economic growth, technological progress and social advance. And the economic growth and market freedom stimulated by this neo-liberal approach to the 'communications revolution' also provides the new basis of political authority and legitimisation. As media consumers, we are offered a new regime of freedom, diversity and choice. 'In the new information era,' we are told, 'the way forward lies through competition and diversity, not through monopoly or centralised controls.' 'If a thousand flowers are allowed to bloom', then we can look forward to unlimited channels of information and entertainment³⁸, 'opening up the sum of human knowledge and human experience to everyone'³⁹. Traditional *laissez-faire* principles promise to secure a utopia of peace, harmony and democracy through universal communication and access to unlimited knowledge/information.

It is, of course, an impressive political and ideological achievement to have discredited public service ideas as bureaucratic and paternalist, and to have established—or rather, re-established—market principles as the vital force of democratic life. This represents the culmination of a process that has a long history, an expression of the extension and intensification of consumer capitalism (as way of life and ideology). The new politics of communication suggests, in fact, a recognition of the superiority of consumerism, as against philanthropic and paternalist traditions, as a form of control and legitimisation.

The potential of the new communications for deepening the hold of consumer capitalism is striking. The combined delivery systems of cable, video and direct broadcast satellite could offer, in quantity at least, a far greater range and choice of programming, if only by exploiting the ready-made archives of largely US television and cinema. And it could also open up new possibilities for time shifting and more flexible viewing. It has been argued that 'competition between multifarious channel operators... will promote efficiency and a deep concern for the wishes of the customer', and that choice 'is the dominant feature of cable that will stimulate efficiency and progress'⁴⁰ (although counter-arguments about the monopoly tendencies already evident in US cable are also pervasive).

Certainly new, unregulated media industries will give an enormous boost to the advertising industry. Television advertisers are particularly sensitive to the rising costs of the past few years, and they are now arguing strongly that the pressures they face necessitate competition in advertising markets. Hence their campaign to introduce advertising to

³⁸ Andrew Neil, 'The Cable Revolution: Britain on the Brink', in Andrew Neil (ed), *The Cable Revolution: Britain on the Brink of the Information Society*, Crawley, Visionhire Cable, 1982, p 22, 25.

³⁹ Kenneth Baker, 'Towards an Information Society', Speech to the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Liverpool University, September 7, 1982.

⁴⁰ Gareth Locksley, 'Cable as Choice', *Telecommunications Policy*, vol 7 no 2, June 1983, p 99.

the BBC. 'The availability of commercial airtime on the BBC, particularly of course on television, would provide businesses in the UK with a tremendous additional asset, and the capability to further develop their business and invest in the future.'⁴¹ But their ambitions are greater than just this. Central to advertising strategies in the 'information age' is the internationalisation and globalisation of consumer and advertising markets.⁴² Currently the EEC and the Council of Europe are interpreting Article 10 of the European Human Rights Convention to suggest that 'commercial speech . . . and freedom of expression are so intimately connected as being incapable of being dissociated'⁴³. It is argued that Article 10, 'though perhaps primarily designed to protect expression of political, philosophical, scientific or religious ideas, covers communication of opinions, ideas or information which do not relate, directly or indirectly, to such matters'; the right to freedom of expression extends to 'commercial speech', on the basis that 'in western economies the free flow of such information is vital to the ability of consumers to make informed decisions about the various products and services available to them'⁴⁴. Law is mobilised to constitute freedom—the freedom of consumer capitalism—as the right to transmit advertisements across national frontiers, and as the right to consume such multinational messages and images.

A massive, if longer-term, impetus to consumer capitalism comes also from the capacity of the new technologies to exploit functions and services beyond those of the traditional mass media. An integrated cable network, it is clear, can provide a whole array of new services: data and information services (e.g., Prestel); electronic banking; remote purchasing; home management services (fire and security alarms); health and education services; market research, and so on. It has been suggested that 'all the usual services of a marketplace can be offered within a large information network'. Such a network offers 'a place where suppliers of network services can show and market their wares, much like the village or town market, except that the purchasers can choose when to sample the wares and are not huckstered'. Paradoxically, as ever more functions of social life are brought under exchange relations, these are endowed with the (rural, egalitarian) attributes of the village market.

At the heart of the 'communications revolution', it seems to us, is this consolidation and reinvigoration of consumer capitalism. It is this climate that has recently provoked one prominent and embattled broadcaster to complain that the media have become 'too preoccupied with "value for money", with commercial concerns, with "cost-effectiveness", with the exploitation of what we produce—to the extent that we have damned nearly lost sight of what we are *supposed* to be about'⁴⁵. The terms of reference of the Peacock Committee, which restrict broadcasting policy to accountancy and financial considerations, 'value for money', uncritically endorse the logic and rationality of commercial and market forces.

Such an approach appeals to the individual as consumer and represses his or her identity as citizen. Thus, what is appealing about cable tele-

⁴¹ IPA Media Policy Group, *Funding the BBC*, London, Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, November 1984, para. 2:3:6. Cf *Funding the BBC from Advertising*, London, D'Arcy Macmanus and Masius, September 1984.

⁴² See Steve Winram (Saatchi & Saatchi), 'The Opportunity for World Brands', *International Journal of Advertising*, vol 3 no 1, 1984; Stella Shamoon, 'Why Global Advertising "Is It"', *Observer*, September 23, 1984.

⁴³ Fritz W Hondius, 'Freedom of Commercial Speech in Europe', *Transnational Data Report*, vol 8 no 6, September 1985, p 325.

⁴⁴ Anthony Lester and David Pannick, *Advertising and Freedom of Expression in Europe*, n.p., Marketing Commission of the International Chamber of Commerce, 1984; cf George Wedell, 'Television without Frontiers?', *Government and Opposition*, vol 20 no 1, Winter 1985.

⁴⁵ Alan Protheroe, 'The Broadcaster's Greatest Hazard Is Fear', *Index on Censorship*, vol 5 no 1, January 1986, p 16.

⁴⁶ Cento G Veljanovski and William D Bishop, *Choice By Cable*, London Institute of Economic Affairs, Hobart Paper no 96, 1983, p 107.

⁴⁷ Stuart Hall, 'The Culture Gap', *Marxism Today*, January 1984, p 19.

⁴⁸ Perry Anderson, 'Origins of the Present Crisis', *New Left Review* 23, January-February 1964.

⁴⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Darmstadt, Luchterhand, 1962, p 217.

⁵⁰ Stuart Hall, 'The State: Socialism's Old Caretaker', *Marxism Today*, November 1984, p 28.

vision is that 'pay-cable is in essence a private relationship between a subscriber and a cable operator. It is therefore not imbued with the public interest concerns which have given rise to the principles of public accountability, objectivity and balance that now govern broadcasting.'⁴⁶ However, we do not want to deny that commercialism has had certain liberating effects on British national-popular culture. As Stuart Hall argues, it has 'made a considerable contribution to the resistance to the more statist features of welfare-state socialism... [to] the loss of deference of an older and more paternalist kind, which, in its modern form, was a strong feature of welfarism'⁴⁷. And we are not unaware of the part played by the public service broadcasting ethos in forging this paternalist and corporatist form of social regulation. But where, some twenty years ago, Perry Anderson could justifiably rail against 'rank, deference and tradition', against 'feudal consciousness', 'universal dilettantism', upper class 'amateurism' and 'patrician political style'⁴⁸, it seems to us that this corporatist ruling-class style now represents a less important political reality. More influential than 'aristocratic' traditions of philanthropy and paternalism, is a monetarist ideology which reduces life to equations of profit and loss.

What must be avoided at all costs is a simple choice between actually existing public service and commercial organisations. Justifiable, and necessary, criticisms of public service broadcasting should not propel those in search of a democratic system of communications into the arms of multinational media corporations. When the public sphere is invaded by commercialisation, as Habermas makes clear, the difference between commodity circulation and social intercourse is erased.⁴⁹ It seems to us important to justify and defend a public forum above and beyond commodity and exchange relations. Statist and paternalist traditions are indeed in crisis, but there still remains, as Stuart Hall argues, a need for a conception of the public: 'The idea of "public space" signifies a construction of space *not* bounded by the rights of private property, a space for activities in common, the holding of space in trust as a social good.'⁵⁰ Something of this ideal, we believe, could be distilled and rescued from the public service tradition of broadcasting.

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REPLY TO ROBINS AND WEBSTER

BY SEAN CUBITT

Kevin Robins and Frank Webster bring a welcome historical perspective to the debates in *Screen* on public service broadcasting, and a thought-provoking analysis of post-war capital and its relation to the cultural and information industries. It's in the spirit of friendly critique that I want to take the opportunity to respond to their analysis, with the aim of getting closer to workable left strategies in media policy. My comments fall roughly into two areas, the historical dimension, and the powers of broadcasting.

If we want to analyse the history of interventions in popular recreations, the nineteenth century is too late to start. Consider this statement of 1738:

I am a professed Enemy to Persecution of all Kinds, whether against Man or Beast; though I am not so much a Pythagorean as to extend my Philosophy to those Creatures which are manifestly design'd for our Food and Nourishment; but We ought to make the Manner of their Deaths as easy to Them as possible, and not destroy or torment Them out of Wantonness. Upon this principle I abhor Cock-fighting, and throwing at Cocks, as well as Bull-baiting, Bear-baiting, Ass-baiting, and all those other butcherly Diversions of Hockley in the Hole.¹

Even ignoring sporadic and individual attacks on bloodsports, pugilism and the more bloodthirsty village games that issued into football in the age of Victoria, we could go as far back as the beginnings of capitalism in the Mediterranean basin and look at ecclesiastical attempts to curtail carnival and theatrical display as early as the twelfth century.² The history of such assaults by

state, church and popular reformers such as the English Revolution's Puritans needs to be consulted if we are not to commit the dual error of characterising struggle over cultural forms as 'unprecedented' (in the manner of campaigners like Mary Whitehouse) and therefore mistaking what is distinctively modern in post-war manifestations. The pages of *Screen*, for example, have debated the question of pleasure in popular cultural forms – notably the cinema – over the last decade.³ The issues are complex, and they are a site of struggle. Although we can find common ground, for example, between certain feminist positions and some right-wing rhetoric on issues around censorship, the perspectives are different and we do ourselves a disservice to equate them.

Thus the equation that Robins and Webster draw between Arnold and Morris in the nineteenth century, and Reith and Grierson in the twentieth, fails to discern in Morris and Grierson a lineage that has been a major inspiration in some of the most impressive socialist engagements with the arts of recent times:

In their community arts programme the GLC were to focus, as Grierson did in film, on four major

¹ Quoted in Robert Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850*, Cambridge University Press, 1973. (The whole of his seventh chapter deals with campaigns to curtail popular pastimes.)

² See Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, New York University Press, 1978.

³ See Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* Autumn 1975, vol 16 no 3, pp 6-18 and Peter Gidal, 'Against Sexual Representation in Film', *Screen* November-December 1984, vol 25 no 6, pp 24-29.

concerns. They were to focus on contemporary popular media. . . . They were to be concerned, not only with the works themselves but also with the means of distribution – to ensure that the works should reach their audiences. . . . They were to be concerned with the people who were previously ignored or stereotyped. . . . And they were to be concerned with participation and involvement. . . with makers who would share their skills as readily as they exhibited their skills.

The GLC's initiatives were to encompass virtually all the arts, and offered the prospect of some practical realisation of the vision of such an earlier artist as William Morris as well as the vision of more recent movements such as the Workers Theatre Movement and the Workers Film and Photo League.⁴

It is hard to imagine the names and examples of Reith and Arnold being cited with the same fervour in the same context: quite simply, members of the Grierson school had a vision of the relation of state and citizenry, perhaps most aptly caught in Humphrey Jennings' title *Listen to Britain*, which had little or nothing to do with the maintenance of bourgeois cultural values in pre-war radio, or of cultural imperialism in Arnold's day. Arnold fed the fascism of a TS Eliot, not the populist 'Fabianism' of Grierson and his collaborators.

One of the most informative discussions of the struggles over radio is to be found in the work of David Cardiff and Paddy Scannell.⁵ They insist that Reith's rule was challenged by the advent of commercial broadcasting, especially by Radio Luxembourg and American PX stations, during the Second World War, with a consequent negotiation over the relative roles of the formation – on the one hand – of a national culture in a bourgeois mould, and – on the other – of morale boosting, especially among soldiers and workers who had good reason to doubt the veracity of coverage of events in which they were actively involved. It needs also to be stressed that it was only during the War that radio became a mass form of entertainment and information distribution in the UK – and that it was initially as a public relay to the workfloors and canteens that it met its recalcitrant market, and only later as a home-based entertainment for blacked-out nights. Here again, the cultural forms became a site of struggle, not of imposed rationalisation. The battle for hearts and minds is not so easily won.

There is a great deal more about Robins and Webster's generalisations about the similarity of working class and ruling class statism. For example, each of the areas cited as 'moral, didactic and paternalist' nineteenth century interventions – sabbatarianism, parks, libraries, Mechanics' Institutes and temperance – had remarkably different origins and patterns of negotiated growth. The temperance movement began in working-class Methodism, whose links with Labour history are well known.⁶ The Mechanics' Institutes were to become, with the library service, the precious tools of working-class self-improvement and political education. The description of home-based leisure ignores the home as a site for the use of commercial product in the form of sheet music from the days of ballad hawkers through to the advent of the pianola. Nor can a theory of consumer capital account for the uses of the pub as a site for political activity since at least the days of the Corresponding Societies in the late eighteenth century. Commercial as well as state cultures have been places for struggle over uses and meanings, struggles that have not been defeated in the post-war period.

If we look for the nature of capital since the war, we find it still conforming to the basic rules of Marx's analysis: most people do not own the means of production; instead these belong to competing owners, who are driven by competition to extract the maximum of surplus value from the workforce. These elements lead to two characteristic tendencies that have increased their role dramatically: the increasing ascendancy of fixed over variable capital (mechanisation) and the tendency to periodic crises. Imperialism has given way to colonialism, marked by a succession of over a hundred wars since 1945, famine in the Sahel and the Indian subcontinent, genocide in Latin America, Sri Lanka and Indonesia, revolutions, juntas and apartheid. In this context,

⁴ *Campaign for a Popular Culture*, Report of the Greater London Council Arts and Recreation Committee, London, March 1986, p 18.

⁵ See 'Radio in World War Two', Unit 8 of the Open University *Popular Culture* course (U203) and 'Serving the Nation: Public Service Broadcasting before the War', in Bernard Waites et al (eds), *Popular Culture: Past and Present*, London, Croom Helm, 1982.

⁶ See Gwyn A Williams, *When Was Wales*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1984.

48 to speak of post-war capital as even 'relatively' stable seems a major misnomer. Even in the UK, attempts to 'rationalise' have been effected only through massive quasi-military operations, for example in the coalfields. And the media industries themselves have been subject to similar forms of 'crisis management' in disputes affecting photographic processing (Grunwick) and newspaper production (Wapping). Meanwhile, representatives of the news media have also become objects of physical attack from pickets and inner city crowds. These are surely not the signs of a successfully achieved hegemony, but of a culture in crisis.

Robins and Webster's analysis can be forgiven the identification of the undeniable advances in the commodification of leisure with a concept of consumer capitalism. However, I believe they do fall into the error pinpointed by Marx in the 1857 *Preface*:

To regard society as one single subject is... to look at it wrongly, speculatively. With a single subject, production and consumption appear as moments of a single act.... In society, however, the producer's relation to the product, once the latter is finished, is an external one, and its return to the subject depends on his relations to other individuals.⁷

In other words, the relation between production and consumption is mediated by relations of distribution, relations of class, race, gender, age and the other factors that divide society, and which are to be defined as polarities produced in struggle over ownership, control and – to return at last to the subject at hand – over meaning.

Thus I would argue that what the authors describe as television's 'proven' advertising ability is itself unsure: readers in the UK may well by now have had a chance to see Beat Productions' analytic series on television, 'Open the Box' (Channel 4, transmitted for six weeks from May 19, 1986) which put a severe strain on the myth of television's 'fabulous powers'⁸. Where Robins and Webster cite the success of Marlboro through media manipulation, my memory as a long-term smoker is that the brand was launched in the UK with a six-month low-price campaign that captured many smokers of budget brands. Likewise, the other campaign frequently cited as successful, the 'Reaches the parts...' campaign for Heineken lager, happily coincided with the hottest summer of the century

in the UK, with pubs running out of the traditional bitter, and the punters switching forcibly to lager. In this arena the major arguments for TV's efficacy are the sales staff of television companies and the advertising agencies themselves, who make their living from this supposition. Yet half a century of research has failed to 'prove' these powers. Even the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising report cited by the authors unfortunately antedates the first slump in advertising revenues ever recorded by the IBA companies at Christmas 1984.

In fact advertisers and broadcasters alike have been pitching for specialised target audiences since the early days of radio – for example via 'race' and country and western stations in the United States, or by the time-slot targeting in most commercial television. To argue the case for mass marketing across both sides of the Atlantic ignores important differences in demography, especially the role of property speculation in the development of urban and suburban sprawl in the US and its contribution to late twentieth century leisure habits. It is because of this vast geographical spread, perhaps, that the US networks pioneered monitoring techniques, yet it might be argued from more recent research⁹ that these techniques have proved an increasingly unsuccessful attempt to understand viewing patterns, biased by the need to sell audiences to advertisers and in a certain sense offering more of an attempt at surveillance than a genuine analysis.

Transnational broadcasting (and programme sales) offer another area for expansion in the Robins and Webster analysis. The earliest international broadcasting, such as the BBC's World Service, was state-originated, and operated according to different – though related – imperatives to those governing the transnationals of pre-war cinema and post-war broadcasting. In pre-war Britain, for example, Hollywood feature films consistently outdid

⁷ This translation appears as the Introduction to the *Grundrisse* (ed and trans by Martin Nicolaus), Harmondsworth, Penguin in association with New Left Review, 1973, p 94.

⁸ See Ian Connell, 'Fabulous Powers', in Len Masterman (ed), *Television Mythologies*, London, Comedia, 1984.

⁹ See David Morley, *Watching Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure*, London, Comedia, forthcoming.

domestic product at the box-office, and today Morley's research indicates that a sizeable proportion of Black Britons prefer US-made programmes. I don't wish to speculate as to why, but to indicate that working-class pleasures have frequently been based – to the despair of paternalist commentators – in imported product. Again without speculating wildly, it may be worth indicating that in Ireland, *Dallas* was read as a subversive text by left and right alike, for its perceived assault on the sanctity of the family: surely not a marker of the producers' intentions. Should we presume to know how it might be received in Nigeria, Kuwait or Birkenhead? The issue at hand is that the wider the international mass audience, the more difficult it is to predict audience reactions, or indeed to target responses and markets for new advertisements. Meanwhile, purchaser power has become a major force in US network TV, as for example in the *Lou Grant* case documented by Todd Gitlin.¹⁰ Finally, mention should be made of the problems encountered in development of transnational distribution technologies of copyright protection, documented in a particularly enormous *European Economic Community Green Paper*¹¹. From this, and from the plethora of ill-matched national legislation and consultative documents around copyright in Europe and elsewhere it is clear that the one thing transnational capital is not is rational.

Robins and Webster are quite correct to identify the policies of recent years as monetarist – a novel strategy, despite its historical antecedents, for the management of crisis. Yet here again we see capital cutting off its nose to spite its face. As UK instances it's worth citing the sale and subsequent destruction of Inmos – a nationalised industry specialising in new technology research and development, designed to give the UK a boost in microchip technology – sold to Thorn-EMI, the sick giant of British leisure industries, and now virtually inoperable. Or we could cite the Tory inspiration – in the interests of stopping such then nationalised industries as British Telecom and the various Water Boards from benefiting from cable installation contracts – to go for an entertainment-led cable industry: doomed to failure in a market still in the throes of the world's most intensive market penetration of domestic video recorders. Moreover, where

entertainment might have been able to give a voice to minorities or, market-led, to voyeurs, it was bound by 'morality' clauses identical to those binding the IBA for network broadcasting, while churches and political parties were explicitly barred from operating channels. In fact, monetarist dogma, in the variety espoused by ruling factions in the US and the UK, lays claim to moral imperatives centring on the duty of the family to take over the work of the welfare state, education provision, caring services, housing and, increasingly, morality and public order. In the UK this goes hand in hand with increasing police powers and the diminution of public access to government information (as well as the abolition of local democracy in the major cities). The increasing role of the family is being enforced by welfare, education and unemployment legislation. Increases in police powers scarcely gel with an image of a contented, media-coddled proletariat sucked in by the tube's visions of plenty.

In fact, I would argue that the very scale of multinational capital is its worst enemy, productive of increasing internal contradictions and a weakening grip on the real needs and desires of the populations it increasingly fails to entice. What then might we begin to investigate as left strategies? There are a variety of models to explore. In South London, a newly established low-power pirate television station, Network 21, broadcasts video art and campaign tapes – illegally so far. In Wales, Plaid Cymru's campaigning has resulted in the formation of Siânel Pedwar Cymru, the Welsh Fourth Channel, which is the envy of many small nations for its programming and as a source of employment. (It is also, incidentally, made up jointly by a commercial station, Harlech, and the BBC Welsh Service.) Throughout the UK, we will undoubtedly continue to use Channel Four as a means for targeting sympathetic audiences, and with that experience to build collective work skills in production, administration, marketing and distribution. New technologies and work-practices (such as those fostered by the ACTT Workshop Declaration) have already led to a left-

¹⁰ Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time*, New York, Pantheon Books, revised edition 1985, pp 247-263.

¹¹ Commission of the European Communities, *Television without Frontiers*, Com (84) 300, Brussels.

wing application of the economies of scale, for example in the production of the Miners' Campaign Tapes by a network of workshops: something similar might be explored in the area of syndicated news journalism, photography and moving images, especially with the rise of the new print media.

SEFT is already involved in work to bring educators together with broadcasters and independent film and video makers, to encourage the growth of links between progressive workers in the media. This is itself a central part of the strategies we have developed to build a living media culture in this country, where SEFT and affiliated national, regional and local bodies offer training, advice and information on all aspects of critical and practical work. One of the most exciting developments has been the growth of

media centres in many urban areas, many of them with a specific educational brief as well as a firm commitment to engaging with those previously excluded from media production. Off-air work, in a country with the highest per capita penetration of domestic VCRs in the world, offers a real alternative form of public service: by, with and for the people. If abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan counties and the increasing centralisation of arts funding does not succeed in killing the independent film and video movement, and if the changes in the school and college curricula (to be explored in a forthcoming issue of *Screen* and in conference papers from the SEFT National Conference 1985) do not crush the media education movement, we may yet benefit from the opportunities that available technologies can give us.



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LICENSED AND UNLICENSED CULTURE: STATE REGULATION AND CULTURAL FORMS

BY KEN WORPOLE

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This has always been a feature of state licensed cultural institutions—from the seventeenth century 'Patent' theatres, through to the modern Arts Council and the BBC. What the state licenses and subsidises are the cultural forms of a metropolitan bourgeoisie—though this does not mean that the cultural forms themselves are exclusive to this class (or were even developed by them), though they have often acted as though they were. By licensing and subsidising certain cultural forms and institutions, definitions of what is 'culture' are located and defined by geographical, economic and class factors. What is not licensed or subsidised is marginalised or left to commercial exploitation, either of which immediately puts the activity beyond the boundary of 'art' or 'culture'. Labour governments have in the past been no different from Tory governments when it has come to defining which cultural forms

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and institutions should be subsidised as part of a state cultural policy, and which should be left to the open market.

In the second half of the twentieth century the effects of this tradition have been exacerbated by the rapid development of new cultural forms, notably technological ones: cinema, photography, mass publishing, radio and television, recorded music, video and so on. These are the cultural forms through which the majority of people express themselves in contemporary society, both by production and consumption, yet they have been left almost exclusively to market forces to develop. In the meantime the state, whether centrally or at a local level, has continued to subsidise and legitimise the traditional nineteenth century cultural forms: orchestral music, ballet, opera, art galleries, repertory theatre and so on. This is admirable – but it is nothing like enough, and it is in no sense a cultural policy either for a social democracy or for the second half of the twentieth century.

Legitimate and illegitimate culture

It is still part of the vocabulary of the acting and entertainment professions to talk about 'legit' theatre – some 320 years after Charles II gave Royal Charters to the two Patent Theatres, Covent Garden and Drury Lane, for the exclusive performance of 'legitimate' drama! The notion of what is 'legitimate' and what is not has continued to divide theatre into two camps ever since. Legitimate drama was originally defined as five-act plays 'with little or no singing, dancing, and spectacle' (*Oxford Dictionary of the Theatre*). Popular theatre from the seventeenth century onwards – farce, musical comedy, revue, and later on light opera and music hall – was by definition 'illegitimate' and liable to prosecution by the Lord Chamberlain, if he so wished. Thus the effect of a state charter was to build a wall around a simplistic definition of what was 'serious' and to condemn popular theatre to perdition. The two Patents awarded in 1662 to Covent Garden and Drury Lane gave them the exclusive right to perform Shakespearian theatre, for example, and outlawed the rights of any other theatres to perform the Shakespeare plays. In effect they redefined Shakespeare from a 'popular' playwright to a 'legitimate' and 'serious' playwright, whose work could only be seen in two London theatres. This monopoly of 'legitimacy' was not broken until the 1843 Theatres Act which allowed 'the many suburban and East End theatres which had sprung up since the turn of the century... the right to perform dramatic works without inserting songs throughout the action and playing continuous music in the background', though until the ending of theatre censorship in 1968 *all* British theatres still remained accountable to the Lord Chamberlain for the plays which they put on.¹

Today the two 'national' theatre companies – the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company – heavily subsidised by public funds, lament the narrow range of people they are able to attract to their

¹ J S Bratton, *The Victorian Popular Ballad*, London, Macmillan, 1975, p 29.

² James Roose Evans
London Theatre,
 London, Phaidon
 Press, 1977, p 106.

productions, notably of course the metropolitan bourgeoisie, failing to realise that they work within a trajectory of state cultural policy in the theatre that goes back over 300 years. The truth is that working class people, in London and elsewhere, were hounded from the 'legitimate' theatre by state legislation, which also declared illegal the popular – and older – forms of theatre. (It is a matter of some irony that the National Theatre has recently re-discovered the medieval mystery plays as popular theatre! Even classic American musicals such as *Guys and Dolls* have finally reached the 'legitimate' repertoire too.)

As James Roose Evans noted in his history of the London theatre: 'Theatre-going was an essential part of the working-class way of life. Although legally limited to burlettas until 1843, the audiences of the Minor Theatres longed for legitimate drama and John Hollingshead remembers actors from Mrs Harwood's penny gaff being marched through the streets of Shoreditch, in the costumes of Othello with eighty members of the audience, to Worship Street Police Station.'²

When Sam Lane lost his licence at the Britannia in Hoxton in the 1840s for a 'straight' production of a play called *Black-Eyed Susan*, he led a procession to Westminster of local people with banners demanding 'Workers Want Theatres!' After the repeal of the Theatres Act of 1843 which had for 200 years limited the licences of 'legitimate' theatres, the Britannia went on to pioneer Shakespeare for working class audiences. But 200 years of repression of subsidised 'legitimate' theatre, outside of the fashionable West End, had effectively killed off much popular interest in the live theatre. What survived were the 'penny gaffs' with their parodies of the legitimate theatre mixed with burlesque and crude pornography, though even here some elements of a deeper seriousness survived. Commercial theatre increasingly took the form of the music hall at the end of the nineteenth century and subsequently 'variety' theatre, which carries through until today.

Both of these forms produced many of the greatest exponents of popular comedy, dance and song, people often of the very poorest backgrounds whose only hope lay in the commercial theatre, and who would never have been allowed near the 'legitimate' stage. This is where many of the greatest comedians and popular entertainers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have come from, artists who have won the affection and loyalty of millions, both within their own country and often internationally: Jenny Lind, Marie Lloyd, Gus Ellen, Little Tich, Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, Stan Laurel, Oliver Hardy, Max Wall, Josephine Baker, Louis Armstrong. Not only did they lay the basis of a new kind of popular theatre, but they were also instrumental in laying the foundations of popular cinema (Charlie Chaplin, Stan Laurel in Britain, and Buster Keaton in America, all started out on the music hall or vaudeville stage). Recent research points out the role of popular theatre in the development of classic narrative cinema in the years 1906-8, particularly in relation to the development of the star system, the increasing length of films up to the now standard feature length and the use of crosscutting from one scene to another, based on vaudeville and

music hall techniques.³ Early films also borrowed heavily on the typology of characters developed in the music hall and the melodrama – poor but honest girl victim, corrupt roué, innocent country boy or naive and honest tramp – which the commercial cinema has continued to use with many variants to this day.

Music hall and variety stars also provided the personnel for radio and television comedy. They worked principally in the commercial theatre because 'legitimate' theatre would not have them; besides which, none of them had been 'trained' in drama school. Only in recent years have such abilities been recognised by the 'straight' theatre, with a number of comedians and variety entertainers being cast in serious roles. Similarly, the stars of music hall or variety theatre are often lionised in old age by critics, or their lives and work incorporated into mainstream and even avant-garde theatre: think of Samuel Beckett's acknowledgement of Buster Keaton, or John Osborne's love-hate relationship with popular theatre in *The Entertainer*, or Heathcote Williams' play *Hancock's Last Half Hour*.

The problem of the BBC

There is a link between the state charter of a certain kind of monopoly theatre and the state charter of broadcasting as exemplified by the BBC. For the BBC was a state monopoly too, for the first 30 years of its existence. It was set up to provide an exemplary kind of national broadcasting, designed to create and reinforce a national cultural identity. That identity once again excluded many of the most popular cultural forms (folk music, jazz, brass band music, political satire, melodrama, low comedy, music hall, popular ballads and monologues, working class and trade union political viewpoints) and the majority of British regional and class accents and registers. Even as recently as 1981, the BBC published a staff pamphlet called *The Spoken Word* which began with the following confident assumption: 'In what follows it is assumed that the speaker uses Received Standard English in its 1980's form. The form of speech recommended is that of a person born and brought up in one of the Home Counties, educated at one of the established southern universities, and not yet so set in his ways that all linguistic change is regarded as unacceptable.'⁴

Not only did the BBC deliberately define by both class and geography what it was to be quintessentially British, but it also espoused a paternalism towards its listening public that brooked no opposition. Even when it came to agreeing new idioms related to broadcasting, that paternalism exacted a toll. For the early consumers of wireless were known as 'Listeners-in', a rather graceless neologism. In his recommendation for a change of usage, Reith wrote, 'This is a relic of the days when he did actually listen in to messages not primarily intended for him; now he is the one addressed, and he accordingly listens. Only the unlicensed listen in.'⁵

The Fabian left and key cultural critics such as Richard Hoggart (and

³ See David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.

⁴ Robert Burchfield, *The Spoken Word: A BBC Guide*, London, BBC, 1981, p 9.

⁵ Asa Briggs, *The Birth of Broadcasting*, Oxford University Press, 1961, p 243.

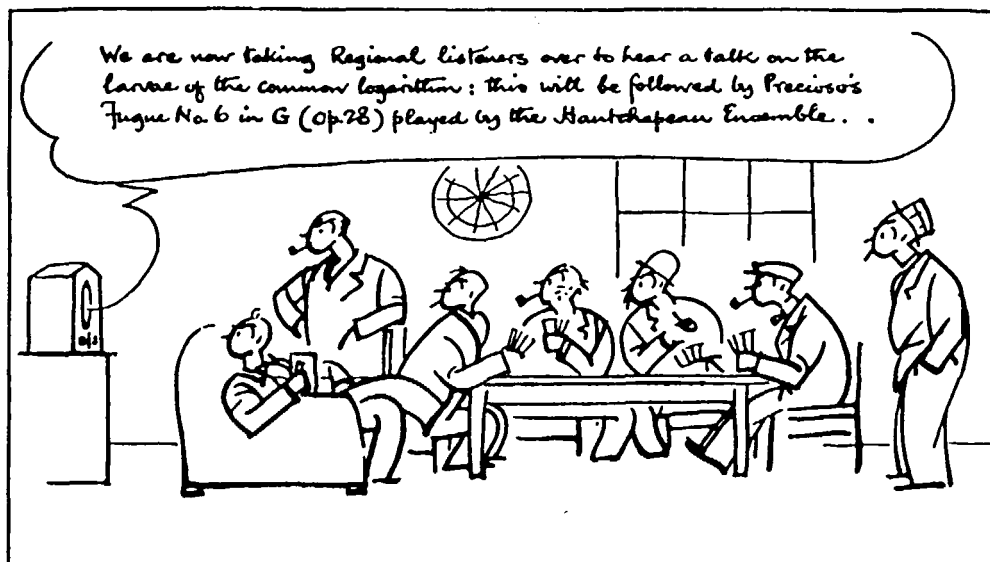
⁶ Colin MacInnes, *Sweet Saturday Night*, London, MacGibbon and Kee, 1967, p 16.

⁷ Simon Frith, *The Sociology of Rock*, London, Constable, 1978.

to some extent Asa Briggs in his magisterial history) have defended the BBC for its role as a cultural educating force, yet they have failed to see that this needed to be part of a reciprocal process, and that all important notions of education rest on the premise of the reciprocity of relations between 'educator' and 'educated', roles themselves which are often easily reversible. The BBC never understood this.

Charles Parker's pioneering 'radio ballads' of the 1950s, which mixed the voices of 'ordinary' working people—coal miners, lorry drivers, travellers, fishermen—with traditional and commissioned folk songs by Ewan McColl, were constantly in trouble at the BBC for their 'political' partisanship. When the writer and radio broadcaster Colin MacInnes put forward the proposal for a series of programmes about the music hall, which included long interviews with both performers and audience (again largely working class voices), he overheard one BBC senior executive, having argued against the series, later comment that 'Oh dear, I've got a feeling it's going to be terribly popular.'⁶

The BBC's ideology eschewed any discussion of 'the popular' other than in terms of putting out fairly bland light entertainment as background music for production—industrial or domestic: 'Music while you work' or 'Housewives Choice'. (Simon Frith in his study of *The Sociology of Rock* quotes Lord Reith as declaring that 'there will never be jazz on Sundays'.⁷) It failed quite specifically to develop new popular cultural forms in a new medium drawing on older traditions of music hall, melodrama and documentary, with the exception of, say, the occasional work of D G Bridson, Ewan McColl, Joan Littlewood, Charles Parker and Charles Chilton (who worked in radio but whose stunning production of *Oh What a Lovely War!* with Joan Littlewood at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, in the early 1960s showed something of



'THEN' and 'NOW' (right): 'Another Changing Face of Britain...'

what was possible when you mixed music hall songs with documentary material; Bridson *et al* were among the very few genuine radio revolutionaries). *The Archers* was a development within radio of some significance, but it was never really built upon, or developed in other settings. In his invaluable record of the early days of BBC radio, *Prospero and Ariel*, Bridson wrote of the era of decline in BBC radio in the 1950s, an era that naturally led to the development of the more 'exciting' pirate and commercial stations: 'Light music was there for the masses, and rock had come to join it, in a rather tentative way that the pirate stations were later to replace with pop far more attractively packaged. But so far as serious listening went – which was meant to provide the backbone of the Home Service output – cosiness was the watchword, where the real need was for trenchancy. In popular terms, radio stayed on the defensive – it never went over to the attack.'⁸

Thus the cultural conservatism of state broadcasting sold the pass to commercial forces. Ironically, when commercial television came along it actually did develop some important new cultural forms within the much despised 'soap opera' (the links with popular melodrama – the key nineteenth century aesthetic mode, I believe – were obvious) and today series such as *Coronation Street*, *Brookside* and *East Enders* have to be seen as significant popular cultural achievements.

The 'voice of the people' which the BBC could have been, was for most of its life – until the threat of pirate radio – the voice of Oxbridge. As Bridson noted, 'It seemed to me that since its inception, broadcasting by the BBC had been the exclusive concern of "us", and listening the lucky privilege of "them". That the man in the street should have anything vital to contribute to broadcasting was an idea slow to gain acceptance. That he should actually use broadcasting to express his own

⁸ D G Bridson, *Prospero and Ariel*, London, Gollancz, 1971.



'... Reaction to BBC Programmes', a *Punch* cartoon of February 1941.

⁹ *ibid*, p 52.

¹⁰ *ibid*, p 53.

¹¹ *ibid*, p 120.

opinions in his own unvarnished words, was regarded as almost the end of all good social order.⁹ Bridson also points out that from the beginning of radio broadcasting in the 1920s until well into the 1940s, all radio had to be pre-scripted. Only the King was allowed to broadcast without having his script vetted. The cultural paranoia which affected the BBC meant that there could be no possibility of the 'wrong' voices saying the 'wrong' things on the airwaves. As Bridson comments, '... that spontaneous speech should have been banned by the BBC for the first odd twenty years of broadcasting is almost unbelievable. The fact remains that it was.'¹⁰ (In 1985 it finally became evident that the state security branch, MI5, had their own personnel within the BBC, vetting appointments for possible left-wing sympathies or affiliations.) Right back in the very early days of radio, when there was actually more interest among radio enthusiasts in transmitting radio rather than receiving it, the Post Office would only issue amateur transmitting licences to 'men of good character' who had to provide testimonials. This effectively excluded working class enthusiasts from participating in the 'freedom of the aether'.

The BBC also disguised many of its ideological gate-keeping functions as technical ones. It frequently turned down or refused to use very important oral history material on the grounds that it had been recorded on equipment not up to BBC standards. It fetishised technical standards over cultural values. When radio journalists returned to Britain after the war bringing back German tape-recording equipment (the BBC were still recording on discs), the BBC were unimpressed with the new technology. 'I loudly sang the praises of tape recording to the BBC Administration,' wrote Bridson, 'only to be told that it failed to come up to the exacting standards of BBC engineering! ... Despite the pleas of everyone who came to use tape recording abroad, it was not for a number of years that Broadcasting House was persuaded to change over to the new system.'¹¹ When the pirate radio arrived in the late 1960s, with disc jockeys with regional accents and an evident passion for the music they played (in most cases at least), large numbers of people started listening to them and identifying personally with broadcasters who clearly had not been 'born and brought up in one of the Home Counties, educated at one of the established southern universities ...'. The government response was to outlaw the pirate radios, allowing the BBC to recruit these new voices onto its staff in order to defray widespread criticism of its past elitism. Today, ironically, a Bermondsey market trader's accent or a Liverpoolian voice is somehow felt to be essential on many pop radio and television programmes: a policy of exclusion has been followed by a policy of incorporation.

Even so, within a few years of the pirate 'poachers' becoming BBC 'gamekeepers', a new generation of pirate radios emerged to challenge what had become a new pop music establishment. The story of the mainland pirates of the 1980s is told in the excellent *Rebel Radio* by John Hind and Stephen Mosco, who point out the key role the new pirates played in developing audiences for the new black musics of America:

*The stations had already started to exert a major influence on the black music scene. For the first time, they provided both the music that people actually wanted to hear and an alternative style of presentation to the 'professionalism' of legal radio. Suddenly, radio was in touch with its audience. It dealt directly with a scene and a lifestyle, building up a close relationship with the listener. The radio pirates shared the same music, language and behaviour as their audience.*¹²

¹² John Hind and Stephen Mosco, *Rebel Radio*, London, Pluto Press, 1985, p. i.

¹³ Tom Burns, *BBC: Public Institution and Private World*, London, Macmillan, 1977.

¹⁴ See *Guardian*, February 3, 1986.

The Telecommunications Act of 1984 effectively killed off the new pirates, and within weeks the BBC had recruited the dynamic 'Ranking Miss P' of the pirate station DBC to run a Sunday evening reggae programme on Radio 1.

Despite such moves it is still the case that the majority of BBC staff have been largely recruited in the old mould—Home Counties, Oxbridge and upper class. As one manager described the new recruits to the General Trainee course to Tom Burns, author of the study *BBC: Public Institution and Private World*:

*Among the younger people there is a certain type, generally speaking an Oxbridge graduate who is generally taken on the course because it's really selective and they are generally the ones to be chosen: charming, very well dressed, very cultured, very refined—all of these things, and what else? Perhaps rather narrow, because they have not travelled much, or never been hungry.*¹³

In television, as in radio, it was the development of commercial broadcasting which developed in some cases a greater sensitivity (though this was clearly mixed with a commercial awareness of advertising potential) to popular taste and popular experience. Commercial television developed *Coronation Street* and other working class soap operas and situation comedies, its presenters were less 'stuffy' and the ideology of much of the programming was rooted in the variety tradition. A recent study of BBC/ITV programming in relation to the coverage of British folk music found that in 1985 the BBC broadcast no folk music programmes at all, compared with eight hours programming by ITV and two Channel 4 series, *Repercussions* and *Beats of the Heart*, both of which dealt with other national traditions of folk and popular music.¹⁴

Much commercial television has been trivial and patronising too, of course. And sexist, racist and homophobic as well. Yet we have to recognise that it became identified with many people as being more 'independent', 'irreverent', 'of the people', than the BBC ever was, in a much shorter space of time. It was able to grow and develop in the very large space left open by the BBC's refusal to engage with other cultural traditions than that of state patronage and the ideology of the national heritage.

The continual framing of cultural debates in terms of 'high' and 'low', or 'serious' and 'popular' has no basis in a serious materialist history of the development of cultural forms, and certainly has no place in a

socialist and productionist strategy in the struggle for cultural democracy. And the new technological forms of cultural production—radio, television, recorded music, photography, film and video, low technology publishing—make it possible to dispense with these out-dated and pernicious divisions. An example from the field of music gives us some indication of the complexities which the new forms offer us. Surprising as it may seem, Vivaldi's 'The Four Seasons', one of the most frequently recorded and played pieces of eighteenth century music in our time, was virtually unknown until the late 1940s. It became universally popular through the medium of the long-playing record. Similarly, the Channel 4 programme of the English National Opera's production of *Rigoletto* had an audience of nearly half a million, four times the number reached by live performances of the stage production over three years.

As Raymond Williams has pointed out on many occasions, the contemporary public sees more theatre and drama today than any previous generation—and they see it on television. Television drama, like situation comedy, is not a pale version of the live theatre but a different cultural form with different generic conventions. This makes it no less powerful. For many years BBC Television enjoyed a very high reputation for the resources it put into the development of television drama, and many of Britain's most innovative dramatists were writing for television in its early days: Alun Owen, Alan Plater, John McGrath, for example. Other playwrights have learned many of their skills in writing for the regular drama series or serials: Alan Bleasdale started out writing a regular slot on Radio Merseyside about a character called Scully; John McGrath and Alan Plater both wrote early *Z Cars* scripts.

Hardbacks and paperbacks

In publishing, the divide between 'legitimate' and 'non-legitimate' forms clearly was elaborated out of the distinction between hardbacks and paperbacks. Hardback books were meant for the libraries and educational institutions (the literature legitimated by the state), whereas paperbacks emerged to supply the wider reading public through mass commercial retailers. It is still the case that many learned journals and the literary magazines and literary pages of the quality press will only review hardback books, though this is beginning to change at last. As John Sutherland has written,

*The paperback revolution of the late 1950's and 1960's gained much of its energy from fiction which the public library could be expected to disapprove of: Woman of Rome, The Ginger Man, Lolita, Lady Chatterley's Lover, The Naked and the Dead, Catch 22, Candy. Anyone who wanted to keep up with the moving frontiers of permissive fiction was forced out of the libraries; paperbacks often had the glamour, as it were, of an informal Index Librorum Prohibitorum.*¹⁵

¹⁵ John Sutherland, *Fiction and the Fiction Industry*, London University Press, 1978, p 20.

In a recent article in the *New Statesman*, Alison Hennegan, the buyer for the Women's Press Book Club, took up the theme of the continuing divide between hardback and paperback books: 'For the great majority of these readers – who are also prepared to be buyers, not just borrowers – hardbacks, even at a now comparatively cheap £10.95, are worse than useless.' When publishers announce new feminist books in hardback, Alison Hennegan says that she 'argues that a book dubbed "minority" in one part of the trade might prove "popular" in paperback format, differently marketed.... Hardback books say weight of learning, institutionally vouched for, to be cherished for a lifetime – or else. Paperbacks, apparently, say friendly, accessible, discardable if disagreeable.'¹⁶

Another significant difference between hardbacks and paperbacks lies in the design of their covers: historically, the hardback jacket emphasises typography (i.e., literariness) whereas paperbacks have pioneered new forms of figurative design – both striking and salacious. Nick Kimberley and I have written elsewhere on the importance of paperback design in the 1950s as part of a conscious project by a number of small paperback publishers to win a wide reading public to a serious European and American contemporary literature which the mainstream publishers were too conservative to handle.¹⁷

'Serious' literature continues to be legitimated by prizes and bursaries to writers which always exclude the popular forms of writing. When the Book Marketing Council held a promotion competition in 1983 to select the 12 best novels written in English since 1945 (and which conveniently happened to be in print!), it was reported that 'the judges began by excluding all genre fiction – thrillers, detective stories, children's books and science fiction.' This peremptory dismissal of some of the most important writing in English since the War, certainly so in science fiction and children's literature, is clear evidence that literature is still firmly divided into 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' forms, which largely correspond to division between the library reading public and the paperback buying public.

Legitimacy bestowed by national and local government

It should come as no surprise to learn that the wording of the local government act which allows spending on 'the arts' should be pre-disposed towards the traditional cultural (i.e., nineteenth century) forms. This has certainly created major problems for arts workers in the recent Greater London Council Administration and in the Cultural Industries Unit at the Greater London Enterprise Board (GLEB), and of course even more particularly for the arts organisations funded (or in some cases not) by them. For when workers began to advocate grants or loans towards projects and organisations involved in cultural training programmes, new media technology, ethnic magazines and journals, cultural forms which bridge both arts and scientific purposes (i.e., video), it was discovered that lawyers used existing legislation to reject

¹⁶ Alison Hennegan, *New Statesman*, July 26, 1985.

¹⁷ *Sunday Times*, November 25, 1984.

such projects on 'artistic' grounds. It is worth quoting Section 145 of the Local Government Act 1972 (which governs all arts spending in England and Wales) in full:

(1) A local authority may do, or arrange for the doing of, or contribute towards the expenses of the doing of, anything (whether inside or outside their area) necessary or expedient for any of the following purposes, that is to say—

- (a) the provision of an entertainment of any nature or of facilities for dancing;*
- (b) the provision of a theatre, concert hall, dance hall or other premises suitable for the giving of entertainments or the holding of dances;*
- (c) the maintenance of a band or orchestra;*
- (d) the development and improvement of the knowledge, understanding and practice of the arts and the crafts which serve the arts;*
- (e) any purpose incidental to the matters aforesaid, including the provision of refreshments or programmes and the advertising of any entertainment given or dance or exhibition of arts or crafts held by them.*

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of the provisions of subsection (1) above, a local authority—

- (a) may for the purposes therein specified enclose or set apart any part of a park or pleasure ground belonging to the authority or under their control;*
- (b) may permit any theatre, concert hall, dance hall or other premises provided by them for the purposes of subsection (1) above and any part of a park or pleasure ground enclosed or set apart as aforesaid to be used by any other person, on such terms as to payment or otherwise as the authority think fit, and may authorise that other person to make charges for admission thereto;*
- (c) may themselves make charges for admission to any entertainment given or dance or exhibition of arts or crafts held by them and for any refreshment or programmes supplied thereat.*

(3) Subsection (2) above shall not authorise any authority to contravene any covenant or condition subject to which a gift or lease of a public park or pleasure ground has been accepted or made without the consent of the donor, grantor, lessor or other person entitled in law to the benefit of the covenant or condition.

(4) Nothing in this section shall affect the provisions of any enactment by virtue of which a licence is required for the public performance of a stage play or the public exhibition of cinematograph films, or for boxing or wrestling entertainments or for public music or dancing, or for the sale of intoxicating liquor.

(5) In this section, the expression 'local authority' includes the Common Council.

It doesn't take a minute to realise that Section 145 legislates for a pre-electronic era (the arcane reference to the 'public exhibition of cinematograph films' only further confirms this), conjuring up a picture of village greens, morris dancing, amateur dramatics, town hall recitals, clay-throwing, marquetry, flower-arranging, easel-painting and homemade elderberry wine. Given that Fox-Talbot and Daguerre were

busy with their chemicals, glass plates and photographic images in the 1830s and '40s, that Bell was telephoning his brother in the 1870s, that moving pictures were being shown in public in the 1890s, and that Marconi was sending transatlantic signals through the aether by transmitter in 1901, it does seem rather dilatory of whoever worded the 1972 Act not to have mentioned these 'recent' developments.

What Section 145 specifically refers to—and therefore legitimises as culture and entertainment—are dancing, theatre, concert halls, bands (not band as in 'garage band'), and orchestras, arts and crafts, stage plays, cinematograph films, boxing and wrestling and public music. That is to say live performance almost exclusively. Crucial as live performance is in many cultural forms, in 1986 the majority of people get their theatre, melodrama, music and visual images on the radio, television, films and on record: through the electronic forms of mass communication. These popular cultural forms are simply not there in the legislation.

It should also be noted that a number of video productions commissioned by the GLC were commissioned under Section 142 of the Local Government Act, a section which allows local government spending on 'information relating to matters of local government', and which the current government is now assiduously trying to expunge, as it seeks to further limit the economic and political autonomy of local government.

The Cultural Industries

One 1983 initiative by the GLC has begun to overcome the traditional distinctions made in discussions of the 'arts' and 'cultural policy'. For it became evident to the GLC early on in the administration of 1981-86 that an arts policy was also by default an employment policy. For in London the various forms of cultural production are in fact among the city's largest employers. It has been estimated that over 250,000 people work in London's cultural industries, industries defined as including traditional arts employers such as theatres, cinemas, concert halls, but increasingly those who work in broadcasting, recording studios, film processing and the communications industries in general. The GLC response to this was to set up a 'Cultural Industries Unit' under the wing of its Industry and Employment Branch to develop strategies of economic intervention in the arts that were grounded in employment as well as cultural criteria. This innovative mix of criteria effectively made it necessary to go beyond the so-called 'qualitative' issues of aesthetics, and develop an understanding of a cultural programme that was also a programme in political economy. If the majority of people in modern society relate to music, theatre, literature, visual imagery, through recorded music, television, paperbacks and magazines, fashion, design and style (rather than by going to the live theatre, opera, concert hall, gallery, lecture), then a socialist programme for the arts must intervene in the modern industries that produce so much of contemporary cultural production. This actually meant intervening in the commercial market place where this culture is made. And so a programme of investment into

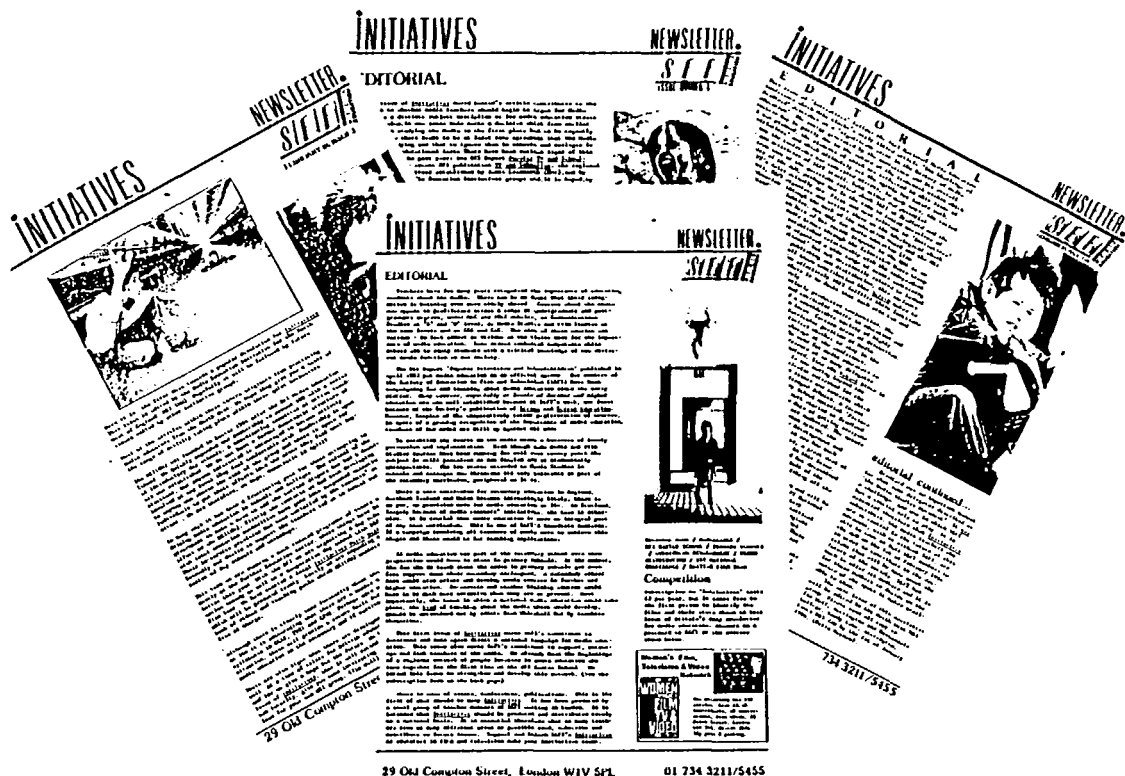
independent record production and distribution, publishing and book distribution, video distribution was inaugurated, as a way of securing jobs in these industries, and of working towards a programme of cultural production that was rooted in economic re-distribution as well.

What has in the past so clearly separated off 'legitimate' forms from 'popular' forms has been the issue of professional training. To get into 'legitimate' theatre people go to the Royal (sic) Academy of Dramatic Arts or other professional theatre schools. In the popular theatre and variety theatre, people learned their craft 'on the boards'. 'Legitimate' music is played by people who have studied music at school and then gone on to one of the colleges of music, whereas popular musical forms (folk, jazz, brass bands, rock, reggae, variety) are largely self-taught or taught communally. It remains one of the abiding ironies of state education that music is one of the least popular school subjects yet one of the most consuming cultural interests of young people – that again expresses the gap between legitimate and popular. Middle-class people with artistic ambitions go to art colleges; the working-class young often go into technical drawing, 'commercial art' as sign-writing and working in a paste-up studio used to be called, or fashion.

This then raises problems of working class access, and indeed that of women and black people, to mainstream 'legitimate' cultural production: publishing and book-selling, theatre administration, 'straight' acting, classical music, film and television production, literary reviewing, ballet, opera and so on. For these have become closed worlds peopled by a professional middle and upper-class, white, mostly male, and recruited through family or class connections. If there is to be a genuine move towards greater cultural democracy, new forms of training need to be developed that will provide bridges into these hitherto closed worlds. The Ethnic Arts Administration Course at the City University in London, a joint project between the University and the GLC Ethnic Arts Committee, is a pioneering example of the kind of training schemes we need. Once the routes are open both ways between 'legitimate' and 'popular' forms of culture, then the categories themselves will become redundant. At present there is no provision for training in the legislation which provides for the arts. This is ridiculous, for any cultural policy must be an educational policy too.

The economies of cultural production are inextricably aligned to political economies. It is time that those interested in the future of the 'arts' concern themselves with the future of economic democracy also, and those who only worry about economics should take note that the struggle for cultural democracy often pre-figures demands for economic democracy. Cultural politics in recent years has been a more sophisticated tool of analysis, and a site of popular struggle, than traditional economic analysis. The desire for social change in Britain is no longer exclusively driven by material want; it is now as likely to be mobilised by addressing questions of self-representation, cultural identity, individual and collective hopes and dreams.

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WALL-TO-WALL 'DALLAS'? THE US-UK TRADE IN TELEVISION

BY RICHARD COLLINS



Dallas: Sue Ellen Ewing confronts an exponent of the cultural imperialism thesis. (Photo by Nicola Field)

¹ Stuart Hall, 'Encoding and Decoding the TV Message' in Stuart Hall et al (eds), *Culture, Media, Language*, London, Hutchinson, 1980.

MEDIA ANALYSIS IS in danger of repeating the behaviour of the Bourbons: learning nothing and forgetting nothing. Slowly and laboriously, simple behaviourist stimulus and response models of effects and audience research are being driven from the field by more nuanced and mediated models of the consumption and effects of the mass media. A variety of studies, including Hall's *Encoding and Decoding*¹ and Morley's *The Nationwide Audience*² have asserted the differentiability of

audience understandings and actions. Yet this understanding of the specificity of micro-cosmic responses to television programmes is rarely replicated when the macro-cosmic impact of programming is considered. Studies of world information flows assert confidently that imperialistic relationships exist, that cultural imperialism is rampant and that everywhere the media are American.³ However, much evidence suggests that the same differential found at the micro-levels of consumption is found at the macro-level, though there has been little reconsideration of the media imperialism thesis other than Lee⁴ and Ravault⁵. In Europe the alarm at the impact of American television programming (for which *Dallas* has become a codeword) has continued, becoming sufficiently fashionable to have assumed the dimensions of moral panic. 'Wall to wall Dallas' is by now the accepted shorthand of critics anticipating the effects of the general introduction of pay cable television to the UK (Chris Dunkley even used that as the title for his recent book⁶) and a French government minister attacked Luxembourg's broadcast satellite (a delivery system for American programming) as a 'Coca-Cola' satellite 'attacking our artistic and cultural integrity'⁷. Indeed, the dreaded *Dallas* was chosen by the Commission of the European Communities to exemplify the perils of non-European television:

*There is already a certain uniformity in the range of films screened on television in the Community. Programmes such as 'Dallas' are carried by almost every television channel in the member states. The creation of a common market for television production is thus one essential step if the dominance of the big American media corporations is to be counterbalanced.*⁸

National broadcasting authorities have recently attempted to regain audiences lost to *Dallas* by reworking it in a national idiom—e.g., France's *Chateauvallon*, Canada's *Vanderburg* and the Netherlands' *Herrenstraat 10*. These initiatives are in turn perceived as imitative amplifications of US imperialism and distinctive symptoms of the decline of authentic national cultural production. But the impact of *Dallas* and of US television in general, is far from unambiguous.

The trade in television programming between the USA and the UK is not one of unequal exchange from which only the USA benefits. The factors that have sustained US dominance of the world trade in audio-visual media, whether films for theatrical exhibition or programming for television, may be changing and new opportunities arising for foreign producers to exploit in the US domestic market the comparative advantages that have hitherto been the prerogative of American producers. Twenty years ago the American automobile industry's command of its domestic market was considered unassailable. It was unimaginable that Americans would drive anything other than six-seated V8s. Now Chrysler has gone to the wall and come back again and the bottom end of the US automobile market is dominated by Toyota, Nissan and Subaru, the top by BMW and Mercedes Benz. There are

² Dave Morley, *The Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding*, London, British Film Institute, 1980.

³ Herb Schiller, *Mass Communication and American Empire*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1969. Anthony Smith, *The Geopolitics of Information*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1980. Jeremy Tunstall, *The Media Are American*, London, Constable, 1977. Tapio Varis, 'The Global Traffic in Television', *Journal of Communication*, vol 24 no 1, Winter 1974.

⁴ Chin Chuan Lee, *Media Imperialism Reconsidered*, Beverly Hills and London, Sage, 1980.

⁵ R J Ravault, 'De l'exploitation des "despotes culturels" par les téléspectateurs' in A Mear (ed), *Recherches québécoises sur la télévision*, Montreal, Editions Albert St Martin, 1980.

⁶ Chris Dunkley, *TV Today and Tomorrow Wall to Wall Dallas*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985.

⁷ *Financial Times*, May 31 1984, p 3.

⁸ Commission of the European Communities, *Television without Frontiers*, Luxembourg, Com(84) 300, Brussels, 1984. p 47.

grounds for believing that US television programming may experience similar import penetration to that experienced by the United States automobile market.

Information is a tradeable product like vehicles, fish, coal and chemicals. Just as nation states see the terms of trade and import/export ratios in coal and fish as legitimate national interests, so do they in information products. Given that comparative advantage in the production of tradeable products resides at different times with different producers, there is no particular economic reason why a nation state should seek autarchy in the production of information goods any more than Switzerland should seek to be self sufficient in seafish, Britain in bananas or Egypt in forest products. In respect of the production of other commodities an international division of labour takes place, why not with information goods?

The evidence of history is that for the kind of information product represented by *Dallas* (high budget soap opera/family melodrama narrative fiction) the United States has long been the overwhelmingly dominant producer.

*By 1925 a third of all foreign revenue came from the United Kingdom alone, where American films captured 95% of the market. In the same period, 77% of the features shown in France came from the United States, as did about 66% in Italy.*⁹

In 1925, Guback states, 235 million feet of motion pictures were exported and 7 million feet imported by the United States. That country's dominance in the world market for audio-visual information goods has been consolidated by successive innovations in technology and product and by raising the costs of production and therefore barriers to the entry of competitors to the market (the star system, sound, colour, wide screen, 3D, epic scale, special effects and so on). In most European countries, a national film production industry survives only through state subsidy and import quotas. The US industry has very successfully exploited its major comparative advantage, the large size of its (rather chauvinistic) domestic market. Gordon¹⁰ shows the relative size of the US and EEC film markets in 1972:

1972 Box Office Grosses in Millions of Dollars

US	1300
Italy	364
France	202
W Germany	186
Britain	154
Belgium	33
Netherlands	29
Denmark	23
EEC	991

⁹ Tom Cuback in Tino Balio (ed), *The American Film Industry*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1976, pp 388-391.

¹⁰ David Gordon in Tino Balio (ed), op cit.

The large size of the US domestic market, its resistance to penetration by foreign product and the evolution of large firms able to produce on a scale appropriate to a business in which demand for its products in general has co-existed with considerable market capriciousness *vis-à-vis* particular products (of ten films one may make very high profits, seven may lose greater or lesser amounts, three may break even, thus long term success will only be available to large scale producers) has given the US film and production industry very substantial advantages in the international audio-visual information goods markets. Many of these characteristics have been replicated in the television programming market. Varis¹¹ has shown the United States' importation of foreign television programming to be exceptionally low (between 1 per cent and 2 per cent imports). The US market for television programming in 1980 was 2.8 billion dollars.¹² This sum is enormous in comparison with the size of the UK programming market—£937 million in 1982¹³. The US market was divided in these proportions between the networks 63 per cent, syndication and barter (i.e., the independents) 23 per cent, PBS 4 per cent, Pay TV 9 per cent, the UK market between ITV 69 per cent, and BBC 31 per cent.

However, the dominance of US producers in European markets is considerably less marked when the television distribution and exhibition medium is considered than it was, and is, with film. Film distribution in Europe was, and is, dominated by US companies—in television (with some recent exceptions—notably Italy) distribution and exhibition is the monopoly of a state agency or is closely regulated by the state. The film exhibition sector in Europe expanded beyond the capacity of domestic producers and a conflict of interests developed between the domestic exhibition sector, enjoying a kind of comprador relationship with US producers and distributors, and the domestic production sector. Exhibitors in Britain had to be compelled by quota legislation to exhibit British films—their economic interests were in general better served by exhibiting imported material made with higher budgets and featuring international stars, and sold to exhibitors at low cost. In 1982 in a belated recognition that the British film production industry was producing too few films for the exhibition sector to fulfil its 15 per cent British quota, the quota was reduced to zero per cent by the national government.

In contrast to the long dominance of the United States in the film business British television has been more resistant to US penetration. In 1981 television transmission of non British/non EEC programming was, for commercial television, limited to 14 per cent. In October 1984 this quota was raised by 1.5 per cent to permit more programming from the Commonwealth. No formal restrictions exist for the BBC which has in general limited itself to the 14 per cent prescribed by the statute for commercial television. However, there are signs that the BBC's financial difficulties are leading to its transmission of increasing quantities of foreign programming. In 1982 (BRU 1983) 31 per cent of the Corporation's prime-time television came from overseas, 26 per cent from the USA. Seventeen per cent of BBC1 programming that year was

¹¹ Tapio Varis, op cit.

¹² Grieve, Horner and Associates, *A Study of the United States Market for Television Programs*, Toronto, Canada, (undated consultants' report probably published in 1981), pp 108-109.

¹³ Broadcasting Research Unit, *A Report from the Working Party on the New Technologies*, London, 1983.

¹⁴ *British Business*,
September 16, 1983;
October 5, 1984;
August 30, 1985;
September 9, 1985.

of non-BBC origin, 22 per cent of BBC2 programming was of non-BBC origin (although these percentages may, of course, have included British or EEC material originated 'out of house'). The balance of trade in television programmes between the UK and North America (statistics that disaggregate Canada and the USA are unavailable), over the last five years for which information is available, has turned against the UK. However, a longer term indexical analysis modifies this conclusion by demonstrating that there is considerable variation in the trading relationships between the UK and North America:

Balance of Trade in Television Programmes between UK and North America:

£m	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
	+ 11	+ 5	+ 3	+ 12	+ 2	- 1	0	- 13 ¹⁴

During the period 1977-84 UK exporters maintained the largest proportion of their sales to North America. (The North American component of overall TV programme sales was 56 per cent both in 1977 and 1984 and varied between 43 and 61 per cent overall.) But UK importers increased the proportion of overall purchases from North America (the North American component of overall TV programme imports varied between 43 per cent in 1977 and 71 per cent in 1984).

Essentially British television distribution/exhibition capacity has been rationed by the national government. The protected and rationed domestic distribution/exhibition sector has permitted the production of high budget, high production values, quality programming in the UK. Revenues from the sale of audiences to advertisers or from the sale of broadcast receiving licenses are deployed to supply programmes to a market that is both guaranteed 84.5 per cent of broadcast hours for UK/EEC programmes) and limited (four channels). Control of the distribution/exhibition sector is tight and has permitted the growth of a production sector in Britain where the quality and quantity of domestically produced programmes strengthens the bargaining position of British broadcasters in their negotiations for the purchase of foreign programming and whose own products can successfully be sold in international markets.

At a level of economic analysis it is at least an open question whether the public interest in the UK has been best served by the film industry regime; supplying the British entertainment information goods market with cheaply purchased high budget quality products imported largely from the USA; or the television industry regime of denying entry to 86 per cent of the British entertainment information goods market to foreign productions. However, it is clear that with information goods other criteria than purely economic ones obtain. One of my purposes has been to show that some form of economic analysis and policy has to be formulated if questions of communication sovereignty and cultural imperialism are to be addressed sensibly, but the arguments about a New World Information Order, free flows versus balanced flows etc, show

that many interests see more than economics at stake in the production and consumption of information goods.

Concern about the effects of mass communications has been persistent since the beginning of the mass media era—whether that is dated from Gutenberg's or Marconi's time. However, in the decades since World War II the focus of concern has shifted from that for individuals, under-represented or vulnerable groups within a particular nation state to concern with and for the nation itself. The threat to communications sovereignty latent since the beginning of the twentieth century and slowly actualised in North America (Canadian subordination to US broadcasting remains the classic, even though earliest, instance) has with the triple impact of new distribution technologies, new ideologies of deregulation, and the accelerating demand for quantities of high-budget but low-cost software, become a matter of general concern. In Western Europe, national governments have lost confidence in their ability to maintain communications sovereignty buttressed by national newspaper and publishing industries and state control of broadcasting. Italy's experience, following the Tele-Biella judgement, of the national broadcasting monopoly's vanishing access to the Italian people in favour of unregulated private broadcasters distributing largely US programming is exemplary. Moreover, the critique of the loss of communications sovereignty customarily runs in harness with a qualitative judgement that the new order and its product is inferior to the old. The concept of cultural imperialism is dependent on qualitative and quantitative judgements. The conditions of quantitative subordination are economic and organisational, the conditions of qualitative subordination are cultural and aesthetic.

It is an enduring European trope to hold up a mirror to US chauvinism. In the UK critical concern focuses on the proliferation of US-style hamburger outlets, not on the proliferation of Turkish, Greek and Lebanese kebab houses, or French, Italian, Indian and Chinese restaurants. The productivity of US cultural influences are very quickly forgotten—e.g., the appropriation of its practices by modernist artists (e.g., Brecht and Grosz), the impact of Hollywood cinema on the Nouvelle Vague, the New German Cinema, or on Italian film-makers like Sergio Leone or, as has recently been claimed, Gianni Amelio.

The shift in film and television production (though as indicated above, a shift that is far from total), from an artisanal mode of production where products are strongly marked by an authorial signature, whether that of director or scriptwriter, to series production in which it hardly makes sense to ask who is the author of *Dallas* or *Coronation Street*, is customarily deplored as a particularly insidious form of cultural imperialism. Yet this seems to me no more cultural imperialism than the adoption in Britain of the electrical engineering manufacturing techniques of Halske and Siemens, Pascalian mathematics or the astronomical theories of Copernicus and Galileo. US television series production techniques have dominated television in Britain since the '60s, co-existing with (some would claim making possible) British

television's substantial dominance of the UK audience ratings. It is this format that broadcast media have uniquely made possible and conjured into existence.

Radio and television's creation of an audience consuming upwards of four hours of broadcasting per day and a 'flow' of programming makes possible and demands temporally extensive continuous fictions in a way that neither the newspapers nor the cinema did. Cultural forms like *Coronation Street* and *Dr Who* have endured in the UK for more than twenty years. What literary or dramatic precedents are there for narratives that exist without closure for such duration? It is this shift in programme form, the demand from audiences for choice and high budget productions, that has created an international market-place for products like *Dallas*, although US producers, though paramount in this international market-place, are not the only players. A condition of consistent success in the international market is the production of product appealing to international tastes and with a national content confined to the internationally current stereotypes of individual national histories and formations. Thus British television presents to the world a costumed image of Britain as a rigidly but harmoniously hierarchised class society: *Brideshead Revisited*, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, *Upstairs, Downstairs*; Japan the shogun and samurai pasts; Italy *The Borgias*. *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, *Hotel* and *Flamingo Road* represent the United States to international television viewers in contemporary melodrama in which the values of capitalist business and the family are presented both positively and negatively. But so popular are serial melodramas generally on British TV, that in May 1983, *Dallas* came only eleventh in the 50 highest audiences of the month, beaten by sundry episodes of the ITV serials *Coronation Street* and *Crossroads*. (Of the 50, 24 were watching domestic melodramas, of which 22 were of British and 2 of US origin.)

Nonetheless, screening American programming is an attractive option for British broadcasters. By doing so, programmes with high production budgets acquired at low cost will tend to attract and retain audiences at a lower cost per 1000 viewers than will domestically produced material. To establish relative production and acquisition costs of the programming is extremely difficult. The industry is a remarkably secretive one and both sellers and buyers are reluctant to reveal the costs of transactions. To these difficulties should be added those of fluctuating sterling/dollar rates and significant and rapid changes in production costs. (Grieve, Horner cite a 60 per cent rise in cost per episode of *Lou Grant* between 1977 and 1981.¹⁵) Both factors mean that the figures that follow should be treated with some caution. However, they are figures around which there is significant convergence from a variety of sources, industry journals, consultants' reports, or my interviews (mostly off the record) with industry sources.

In 1983 *Variety*¹⁶ estimated the UK costs per hour of TV programming as follows: ITV £40,000; BBC £30,000; Channel 4

¹⁵ Grieve, Horner and Associates, op cit, p 94.

¹⁶ *Variety*, September 14 1983, p 40.

£25,000; bought in US programmes £2,000. In the next month the same paper¹⁷ estimated the production fee per episode of US TV series as follows: *Dynasty* 850,000 dollars; *Hotel* 700,000 dollars; *Dallas* 850,000 dollars; *Falcon Crest* 750,000 dollars; *Knots Landing* 650,000 dollars; *St. Elsewhere* 750,000 dollars (i.e., for an hour of product). A year earlier *TV World*¹⁸ estimated the following world prices for US sales of ½ hour TV series: Belgium 1000-1500 dollars; France 8500-10,000 dollars; Italy 4000-4200 dollars; Netherlands 1900-2000 dollars; Spain 1400-1900 dollars; UK 9000-10,000 dollars; W Germany 8500-18,000 dollars.

However, *Broadcasting* points out that half hours are:

*considerably cheaper ... less than 50% of what it costs ... to license a full hour episode. ... the reasons half hours are considerably less expensive ... than full hours are numerous but heading the list is that video tape is used ... Another factor that contributes to the less expensive half hour show is that they are usually produced on permanent sets in studios and do not require the elaborate location shooting and special effects often required by full hour dramas.*¹⁹

The *TV World* figures for exhibition prices are likely to be less reliable than *Variety*'s for production prices, but even as ballpark estimates it can be seen that for, say, an episode of *Dynasty* costing 850,000 dollars a TV channel in the UK paid about 20,000 dollars, and the Netherlands 4000.

In 1985 *Variety* reported that the BBC had been acquiring *Dallas* for 43,000 dollars per episode and that unprecedented competition between the BBC and the British commercial company Thames led the BBC to bid 47,500 dollars per episode and for the rival – and successful – bidder to secure the series for 60,000 dollars per episode. *Variety* noted that 'this may be a record for a series import in the British market.'²⁰ Programming costs per 1000 viewers for the BBC showing *Dallas* in a May 1983 screening attracting 12.7 million viewers at a cost per episode estimated at 43,000 dollars would then have been 3.39 dollars. If we calculate the cost per 1000 of the highest-rated British programme transmitted by the BBC in May 1983, *That's Life*, screened to 12.6 million viewers at *Variety*'s figure of £30,000 or 47,000 dollars per hour – it will have a cost per 1000 viewers that is higher than the cost of *Dallas*, i.e., 3.70 dollars per 1000. The economic benefits of showing *Dallas* hardly need underlining.

With a more successful US programme than *Dallas* benefits are even higher. In 1984, the *Financial Times* estimated the cost to the BBC of the eight-hour US mini-series *The Thorn Birds* as £600,000. The last episode's screening attracted an audience of 15.75 million viewers (then the BBC's biggest audience for more than two years, though still well below peak audiences for *Coronation Street*, a serial that has run on ITV for 25 years). The *Financial Times* hypothesised the costs of the BBC originating *The Thorn Birds* at a minimum of £2m.²¹ However, if we believe those commentators who suggest that the BBC's screening of *The Thorn Birds* was the provocation that led the government to

¹⁷ *Variety*, October 5 1983, pp 56, 57, 70, 71.

¹⁸ *TV World*, July 1982, p 46.

¹⁹ *Broadcasting*, October 22 1984, p 70.

²⁰ *Variety*, January 23 1985, p 1. (Thames later succumbed to BBC/IBA pressure to return the series to the BBC.)

²¹ *Financial Times*, February 1 1984, p 19.

²² *Variety*, April 27 1983.

²³ *Sunday Times*, February 5 1984, p 51.

²⁴ *TV World*, October 1985, p 52.

establish the Peacock Committee to review BBC funding, the costs of *The Thorn Birds* may have been very high indeed.

British TV is required to exhibit 84.5 per cent British/EEC productions and has developed a successful production strategy for British and international markets. Thames Television produces 950 hours of programming annually at a cost of £30,000,000²², i.e., at an average cost per hour of approximately £31,600, of which an unspecified number of hours produced revenues from foreign sales of £18,000,000 (of which £9m were US sales and £2.5m Australian). The *Sunday Times*²³ estimates revenues from US sales of 20,000 dollars per hour for British producers, i.e., there are grounds for belief that British producers are able to sell an hour of television into the US market at about the same price that US producers sell an hour of television into the British market. I have been unable to confirm this supposition since US commercial stations and distributors have been unwilling to reveal the acquisition costs to US television stations of British programming (e.g., of *The Benny Hill Show*, cited as yielding 'the biggest grosses of any overseas production in the USA'²⁴). Nor are audience ratings in the public domain in the United States. However, interviews with a senior executive in Mobil Oil (the sponsor of *Masterpiece Theatre* on PBS) and senior figures in PBS and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting have enabled me to establish acquisition costs of programming for *Masterpiece Theatre* and ratings for representative screenings.

Masterpiece Theatre acquires its programmes principally from the UK and to a lesser extent from other Anglophone producers such as Ireland and Australia. A June 1983 screening (chosen as close as possible to the May 1983 screening of *Dallas* already discussed) of an episode of the BBC drama *Sons and Lovers* achieved a share of 4.2 per cent of the US national audience (reached by 273 PBS stations offering *Masterpiece Theatre*) or 3.5m households, each of which is estimated to have a prime-time viewing population of 1.7 people. 5,950,000 Americans therefore watched an episode of *Sons and Lovers* (after at least three previous episodes had been transmitted and an audience for the series built). If we assume an acquisition cost of 100,000 dollars per hour for *Sons and Lovers* (at the low end of the 100,000/200,000 dollars per hour range of acquisition costs cited for *Masterpiece Theatre*) we find a cost per 1000 viewers of 16.8 dollars. Compared to the BBC's cost per 1000 viewers of 3.39 dollars for *Dallas*, *Masterpiece Theatre*'s British programming looks expensive. Though the cost of acquisition by Mobil is, of course, less than the cost of production of a comparable production *ab initio*.

Other evidence suggests that a price of 100,000 dollars per hour for quality drama for the US market is plausible. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation sold its most successful drama series *Empire Inc.* to Metromedia for US commercial syndication for 500,000 dollars plus a percentage of revenue for three two-hour programmes (re-edited from the original six one-hour episodes sold to the BBC for 25,000 dollars per hour). However, it is clear that although British producers are more successful than any others at securing US sales (and are second

only to the US in sales to third countries), they are still hampered by the small size of the British home market compared to that of the US domestic market. Their success is conditional, I suggest, on the restriction of non-EEC entrants to the UK market to 14 per cent of programme hours transmitted. British producers are also disadvantaged in that while British and European audiences are very receptive to US programming, US audiences are less receptive to European product. Much of Thames TV's revenue from foreign sales comes from format sales rather than directly from programme sales. The US *Three's Company* was developed from Thames' *Man about the House*. In 1984 *Variety*²⁵ estimated that US syndication sales on the project had realised 150,000,000 dollars, of which Thames took 12.5 per cent (19,000,000 dollars). In contrast the *Benny Hill* shows sold directly to the US in the same version as shown in the UK annually realise 15,000,000 dollars in US markets.

A very strong incentive has existed for British commercial contractors to maximise revenues from foreign programme sales. Until 1986 the excess profits tax levied on profits originating from UK revenues did not apply to profits originating from overseas. As the National Economic Research Associates stated to the Peacock Committee:

*The optimal tax strategy would be to shift revenues to overseas sales while costs are allocated to national programming.*²⁶

In 1982/3 the commercial contractor with the highest advertising revenue (Thames Television) was able to escape levy completely following the strategy described by NERA. Now the government is to modify the levy arrangements by reducing levy on UK profits to 45 per cent of profits exceeding £800,000 and applying a 22.5 per cent levy to overseas profits. But it remains to be seen whether the Inland Revenue and the IBA will be able to exact levy either from UK-based companies such as Zenith Films (wholly owned by Central Television but not licenced by the IBA and conducted as an 'at arms length' business with no evident connection to Central's franchise to transmit programmes and sell television advertising time in the English Midlands); to extra-territorial companies such as Thames' joint venture in California, Grand Central Productions; or to sales of intellectual property, such as format rights, that have no direct connection to the franchised activities of an ITV company.

The strength of the US market and its resistance to colonisation by foreign information goods is the foundation of the success of US producers in world markets. But there are interesting signs that the comparative advantage long enjoyed by US audio-visual media producers may be ending. The major strength of the US producers has been their ability to recoup their production costs—even costs of 850,000 dollars per hour—from US sales. This ability is in turn dependent on customers'—US television stations'—ability to pay such sums for programming. This ability is in turn conditional on the existence of a small

²⁵ *Variety*, January 25 1984, p 43.

²⁶ National Economic Research Associates *Report to the Peacock Committee*, London, HMSO, 1985, p 31.

²⁷ Grieve, Horner and Associates, *op cit*, p 4.

²⁸ *Broadcasting*, October 22 1984, p 70.

²⁹ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 19 1985, p 1.

number of exhibition channels – the networks – and their ability to command the lion's share of TV advertising revenues and recycle them (after taking profits and network costs) to producers. But now it seems that the dominance of the networks is waning. Independent broadcasters are increasingly challenging the networks and are – within the limits of FCC regulation – constituting themselves through common ownership and syndication of programming as challengers to the networks. Grieve, Horner²⁷ projects a trend in which the US network share continues to decline:

Percentage Share of Viewing	1975	1981	1986	1991
Network Stations	84	75	67	56
Independent & Public	16	22	22	23
Pay Services		2	7	13
Non Pay Cable Services		1	3	7

If the attrition of the networks' share of audiences and revenues continues to be faster than growth in aggregate revenues then the revenue pool will be shared more evenly among a greater number of broadcasters with each commanding less resources than do the biggest current ones. The ability to pay for the production costs of an episode of, say, *Dallas* at an acquisition cost of 750,000-800,000 dollars for an initial screening and 65,000-70,000 dollars for a second screening²⁸ will decline. But the ability of a greater number to pay intermediate prices for programming will rise. In this new regime, where very high cost programming may no longer be afforded and in which demand and ability to pay for low to mid-cost programming increases, there may well be increased opportunities for sales to the USA by foreign producers. Increase in US distribution capacity (through licensing of new terrestrial broadcasters and satellite and cable delivered pay television) and re-distribution of advertising revenue among broadcasters are likely to diminish the comparative advantage of a strong home market resistant to foreign products long enjoyed by US film and TV producers. But there are also counter indications to this scenario: the merger of one network, ABC, with one of the principle independent groups, Capital Cities Communications²⁹ to form the US' largest broadcasting group suggests that other resolutions of this contradiction are possible.

Studying the trade in TV programming between the US and the UK shows that the media imperialism thesis is by no means clearly demonstrated. UK producers are able to sell to the US markets on considerably better terms than US producers are able to sell to the UK. The volume of trade between the US and UK in TV programming now favours the US but there are grounds for supposing that that balance may in the future become less unfavourable to the UK. This does not disprove the general thesis that media imperialism is practised by the United States, but it does suggest that the thesis demands more thorough

demonstration than it customarily receives. The tasks for advocates of the thesis are not only to demonstrate (as I suspect could be done) that the US/UK trade is an exceptional one and may best be regarded – as does Tunstall³⁰ – as the UK acting as a kind of cadet to the USA in the imperialism game. Other tasks include showing that an adverse balance of trade in one sector, cultural goods, correlates with a general economic, political or cultural subordination. As Ravault³¹ points out, this is not easy to do. Countries such as West Germany and Japan or the Nordic countries have all combined economic prosperity and political and cultural independence with high levels of importation of cultural goods from the Anglophone block – notably the USA, UK and Australia. It would further require demonstration that consumption of US cultural goods produces the feared threat to cultural integrity and independence of consumers and a disadvantageous homogenisation and ‘Americanisation’ of audiences. Liebes and Katz’ work³², among others, suggests that different audiences produce highly differentiated readings of *Dallas*. These appropriations of *Dallas* may, of course, though different, be equally ‘bad’ for audiences but here, too, there are some grounds for scepticism. Since the 1950s work of film theorists has established a convincing aesthetic and cultural case for Hollywood cinema of the 1940s, ’50s and early ’60s. Contemporary feminist film theory positively re-appropriates the despised melodramas and women’s weepies of the American cinema. If it can be done for Universal films, why not for Lorimar television?

A number of Québécois writers have testified to the positive influence of the US mass media in breaking the grip of ‘La Grande Noirceur’ in Quebec and the development of a modern secular society in francophone North America. Gilles Carle’s recollection of his childhood may stand as emblematic of this testimony that not all transborder data flows are baleful indices of the rest of the world’s subordination as periphery to the dominant central metropole of the United States:

*Our radio picked up Buffalo and Montreal, always together, never separate, so that the religious broadcasts always had a pleasant background of country and western music. . . . We seven children would thus recite our rosaries at a gallop, learning that in Quebec the most contradictory dreams are possible.*³³

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I wish to acknowledge my debt to Philip Hayward for his assistance in preparing some of the statistical information which I have presented here and on which I have drawn for my analysis.

³⁰ Jeremy Tunstall, op cit.

³¹ R J Ravault, op cit.

³² Elihu Katz and Tamar Liebes, ‘Mutual Aid in the Decoding of Dallas’, in Phillip Drummond and Richard Paterson (eds), *Television in Transition*, London, British Film Institute, 1986.

³³ James Leach, in Seth Feldman (ed), *Take Two*, Toronto, Irwin, 1984.

VERTICAL INTEGRATION, HORIZONTAL REGULATION: THE GROWTH OF RUPERT MURDOCH'S US MEDIA EMPIRE

BY DOUGLAS GOMERY

DURING 1985 THE US television industry experienced a spate of corporate takeovers unmatched since the 1950s. In a single year one network (ABC) was sold (to Capital Cities Communication), another (NBC) taken over (by General Electric), and the third (CBS) nearly toppled by cable television mogul Ted Turner. This torrent of mergers was fuelled by the extraordinary profitability of the television business in the US. The Morgan Stanley banking house has estimated that earnings for mass media corporations increased by an annual average of more than 16 per cent between 1979 and 1984. Many longtime owners of stations and networks internalised this information, forecast a cresting of the market value of their properties, and simply 'cashed in'.

But it took a significant transformation in policy by the governmental body which regulates television in the US, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), to create a climate in which this 'merger mania' could take place. The FCC, under the administration of President Ronald Reagan's man, Mark Fowler, has long talked of terminating all rules governing the ownership and control of television stations and networks. In 1985 it raised the number of television stations a single company could own from seven to twelve. Moreover, Fowler has stated, time and time again, that he would not interfere with friendly or unfriendly takeover attempts.

The consequences of this new lenient regulatory climate were not long in appearing. Thus, Capital Cities, General Electric and Ted Turner moved to bid for media companies without fear of regulatory compli-

cations or procrastinations. Even past Commissions of conservative bent would have held up the far-reaching deals of 1985 through delays in 'processing' applications. The new FCC policy of deregulation has enabled bigger corporations to swallow up smaller enterprises and gain a greater measure of economic power. The Fowler FCC maintains that the control of monopoly power in the television industry should best be handled by the antitrust laws as prosecuted by the United States Department of Justice. Yet the Reagan administration has passed on all opportunities to use the Justice Department and recently, in fact, proposed a complete overhaul of antitrust laws in favour of big business.

The implications of this transformation of public policy toward the television industry in particular, and the mass media business in general can best be understood through an examination of the recent activities of one particular company—Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, Ltd. Murdoch's proposal of a fourth US television network has reintroduced, again, the whole question of the government's proper role toward television.

No one has ever been satisfied with the amount of power which rests in the hands of the three US television networks. Conservatives and liberals alike proclaim there is a problem, but do not agree on a solution. For many years a liberal FCC has noted that economies of scale would always limit networks to a few, and thus it tried to institute rules to check the excesses of network power.

Under Mark Fowler a conservative FCC has tried to deal with network domination by eliminating all regulations and thus enabling new corporation(s) to challenge ABC, CBS and NBC. Implicitly it concedes that there will only be a handful of powerful networks, but argues that four would be better than three. Its policies have favoured the well-to-do and placed the ownership and control of the mass media in fewer and fewer hands. The price of stations has gone up so far that only the very rich can afford to enter the television business. Only wealthy, powerful individuals and their corporate empires have the actual resources or access to the resources to acquire stations and develop the programming production and distribution necessary to mount a fourth television network. The case of Rupert Murdoch illustrates how this version of 'free market' deregulation works for a small group of very wealthy individuals and corporations.¹

The Case of Rupert Murdoch

In 1985 Rupert Murdoch began a serious quest to create a fourth US television network. But he did not initially move directly into the television industry, but rather into television's source of programming, Hollywood. In March 1985, Murdoch agreed to buy half of Twentieth Century Fox, the movie and television production studio, from Denver oilman Marvin Davis. Murdoch's closely held News Corporation, Ltd would pay 250 million dollars for half of TCF Holdings, Inc, Twentieth

¹ The liberal attack on the networks is summarised in Nicholas Johnson, *How to Talk Back to Your Television Set*, Boston, Little Brown, 1970, while the conservative position can be found in Stanley M Besen, Thomas G Krattenmaker, A Richard Metzger, Jr, and John R Woodbury, *Misregulating Television: Network Dominance and the FCC*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984.

² For a useful summary of the end of Murdoch's attempted takeover of Warner Communications see *Broadcasting*, March 26, 1985, pp 59-60.

³ *The Wall Street Journal*, March 22, 1985, p 8.

⁴ The Hearst Corporation is, of course, the successor corporation to the William Randolph Hearst newspaper empire, used as a model in Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*. Today this privately held corporation does business in newspapers, magazines, over-the-air broadcasting, cable television, and book publishing. See *The New York Times*, March 6, 1983, pp F1, F8.

⁵ ABC's eight stations reach 24% of US television households, CBS's stations reach 20%, as do NBC's stations. The Fox/Metromedia combine and the six stations owned by the Tribune company of Chicago reach 18%. Only Tribune and Fox/Metromedia rival network station ownership power. See Michael Couzens, 'The Powers of Television', *Channels*, Field Guide 1986, p 26.

⁶ *The Wall Street Journal*, May 7, 1985, p 2.

Century Fox's parent company, fully owned by Davis. This transfusion of a quarter of a billion dollars provided needed cash to a studio's ailing balance sheet. In turn Murdoch achieved a long sought *entrée* into US film and television programme production.

Murdoch, who had known Davis since the late '70s when they had participated in Ventures Group, an entertainment financing concern, approached Davis in 1984 about a possible investment in Warner Communications, Inc, parent company for Warner Bros. At the time Murdoch owned seven per cent of Warner's stock and had publicly stated he wished to take control of the corporation. Instead Warner bought out Murdoch for 41 million dollars.² Murdoch used the proceeds from this 'greenmail' to help finance his purchase of half of Twentieth Century Fox.

Even by this point it was well known on Wall Street that Murdoch wanted *all* of Fox. One entertainment banker noted: 'It won't be long before Rupert Murdoch owns or controls Fox outright. He's really a one-man band, and he's not passive and not collaborative.'³ This prediction indeed would come to pass by the end of 1985, yet not before Murdoch and Davis would shock the entertainment world by purchasing the most powerful set of US television stations outside those owned and operated by the three television networks.

Early in May 1985, Murdoch and Davis announced that they had signed to buy seven independent television stations from Metromedia, Inc in a deal which included 650 million dollars in cash and the assumption of the Secaucus, New Jersey-based corporation's 1.3 billion dollar debt. To help finance this acquisition, Murdoch and Davis agreed to sell Metromedia's Boston station to the Hearst Corporation for 450 million dollars, bringing the real purchase price for six stations into the billion and a half dollar range.⁴

The six Metromedia stations are independent television stations, not affiliated with any network. The six (one per market) are located in New York City (the largest US television market), Los Angeles (the second largest), Chicago (third), Dallas (eighth), Washington, DC (ninth), and Houston (tenth). In total more than 18 per cent of all homes with television sets in the US can view one of these stations, providing the largest reach for any set of stations outside of those owned by the three networks.⁵

Murdoch and Davis did not lack rivals in their quest for these valuable television stations. Gulf and Western Industries, Inc (which owns Paramount Pictures) and Coca-Cola Co (which owns Columbia Pictures) made serious inquiries. But both backed out when each learned the price Murdoch and Davis were willing to pay. Gulf and Western and Coca-Cola are publicly-held corporations whose stockholders would not have been pleased with the decrease in earnings which many expected to result from the deal. One Wall Street analyst commented: 'The prices [Murdoch and Davis agreed to pay] were absolutely ridiculous. Any public[ly held] company that would have taken it would have been looking at earnings dilutions for many, many years.'⁶

Rupert Murdoch

and family own 51% of

News Corporation

registered in Adelaide, South Australia

United States	Britain	Australia
(News International)		
16% of operating profit†	46% of operating profit†	38% of operating profit†
Television		
20th Century Fox (studios)* Metromedia (6 TV stations)*	Sky Channel cable TV	TEN-10 ATV-10
Newspapers		
New York Post Sun-Times, Chicago Boston Herald Express-News, San Antonio	Sun News of the World Times Sunday Times	The Australian The News, Adelaide Daily Mirror, Sydney Daily Sun, Brisbane Sunday Times, Perth Daily Telegraph, Sydney
Magazines and books		
New Woman Elle Star New York Magazine Business & Commercial Aviation Ziff-Davis (14 business titles)* Other	Times Supplements Times Books Elle William Collins (42% interest) Bartholomew maps Eric Bemrose printers Convoys warehousing, transport Townsend Hook paper	New Idea TV Week Computer Power software Ansett Airlines (50% interest)

† Share of operating profit in year to June 1985 * New acquisitions, Metromedia not yet finalised

Murdoch paid more than the going rate for the television stations because he wanted to immediately become a major player in the US television business. He told one business reporter that 'When one considers the markets, I don't think the price was expensive at all. There just had to be a premium. But remember that we got some of the biggest markets in the world in one swoop.'⁷ Wall Street analysts calculated the premium thus: in the 1980s television stations in the United States sold for ten times the cash annually generated by the operation. Davis and Murdoch agreed to pay an amount sixteen times cash flow for Metromedia, or sixty per cent more than the going rate.⁸

During the summer months of 1985 Marvin Davis began to study the terms of the takeover of Metromedia. The more he learned, the less he

⁷ *The Washington Post*, May 19, 1985, pp H1, H11.

⁸ *The Wall Street Journal*, May 8, 1985, p 6.

⁹ *The Wall Street Journal*, September 24, 1985, p 3.

¹⁰ *Business Week*, May 20, 1986, p 107.

¹¹ *The Wall Street Journal*, November 6, 1985, p 17; *Forbes*, March, 1986, p 115; *The New York Times*, March 2, 1986, p F30.

¹² *The Wall Street Journal*, February 21, 1986, p 9.

liked the deal, and thus in September pulled out. A source close to Davis summed up the situation this way: 'It was Murdoch's deal from the beginning. Marvin had the option of taking a look, and he just decided not to exercise.'⁹ Moreover, throughout the summer of 1985, Murdoch had also been offering to buy Davis' half of Twentieth Century Fox. Davis was no fool and knew that once Murdoch became fully committed to the purchase of the stations, he, Davis, could extract a higher price for the other half of Twentieth Century Fox. Thus, in September of 1985, to the surprise of few of Wall Street, Rupert Murdoch acquired the other half of Twentieth Century Fox for 325 million dollars, just six months after acquiring the 'first' half for 250 million.

Implementing the Plans

Murdoch now owned a major Hollywood studio and an important set of television stations. Within six months Murdoch had become a significant player in the US film and television business. Murdoch's first move was to place Barry Diller in charge of his new empire which he had renamed Fox, Inc. Diller has the perfect background to run the new film and television empire. He knew how the major networks operated; at ABC in the '70s he pioneered the successful made-for-television *Movie of the Week* series. He also knew Hollywood. At Paramount during the late 1970s and early 1980s he created a consistent string of box office successes. Davis lured Diller to Fox with a salary estimated to be more than three million dollars a year. Murdoch and Diller hit it off immediately and began to work closely together. Diller's management skills serve as one of the linchpins of Murdoch's plans to turn Fox and Metromedia into a major force in the US film and television business.¹⁰

Murdoch and Diller must work fast. Murdoch could lose control of his new film and television empire in 1989 since former Metromedia debt holders have the right to acquire News Corporation stock if Murdoch does not meet a certain payment schedule within three years. That feature was attached to Fox notes of debt by Murdoch's Wall Street advisor, Drexel Burnham Lambert, as an assurance to investors. Knowing Murdoch's overwhelming desire to maintain control of his enterprises, the holders of Fox's debt can count on him to move heaven and earth to pay off the debt within the required three year period.¹¹

Moreover, the Fox and Metromedia acquisitions do not represent Murdoch's only new financial obligations. Within the past eighteen months he acquired more debt by paying nearly 400 million dollars to purchase 13 business and trade publications from Ziff-Davis, as well as begin US and UK versions of *Elle*, the French fashion magazine, and upgrade his *Star* tabloid.¹²

On the other hand, Murdoch's movie and television dealings will generate monies because he has been required to sell some newspapers. The FCC prevents the ownership of a newspaper and television station in the same US media market (the so-called cross-ownership rule). Since

Metromedia has stations in New York and Chicago, Murdoch has had to put *The New York Post* and *The Chicago Sun-Times* up for sale.¹³ Murdoch has already sold one paper, *The Village Voice*. That deal was consummated in June of 1985 when Leonard Stern, chairman of the Hartz Mountain pet food and supplies corporation, paid more than 55 million dollars. Surprisingly, in the light of Murdoch's reputation for conservative intervention in his British papers, the staff of the radical *Voice* was not sure this forced sale was for the better. Jack Newfield, a senior editor, said: 'On paper, you're not going to find a worse owner than Murdoch. In practice he turned out to be terrific for us. He gave us absolute freedom.'¹⁴

Murdoch has also had to make other changes in the way he does business. For example, the Communications Act of 1934 requires the owner of a US television station to be a United States citizen.¹⁵ Murdoch has recently become a US citizen, and set up headquarters in New York City. But Australia also has a law requiring its television stations to be owned by citizens who are residents. In 1981 a special Act was passed to make an exception for Murdoch, who then retained his Australian citizenship but lived in London. Thus surely, unless another extraordinary exception is made, Murdoch will lose the Melbourne and Sydney stations which have long been the centrepiece of News Corporation, Ltd.¹⁶

But for now the centrepiece of the Murdoch empire has become Fox, Inc. He is betting that in the long run his new film and television enterprise will prosper as a whole to a greater degree than have any of its individual parts. For studios such as Twentieth Century Fox to rent programmes to non-network television stations, the studio must finance the show and then sell it—with no guarantee of enough stations reaching enough viewers. Such undertakings are risky and may yield little profit. Assured access to key metropolitan audiences through Metromedia stations, however, should remove a great deal of the risk for Fox. An industry rule-of-thumb states that running a show in New York and Los Angeles nearly guarantees enough revenues to pay for its creation.¹⁷

More than two hundred other independent stations vie for programming, double the number only seven years ago. Wall Street observers believe that the prospects of finding enough independent station outlets for a fourth network appear to be promising. Before 1980 only the top 20 or 30 cities had independent stations. The latest survey indicates that independents exist in all markets down to the sixty-seventh media market—and at that point 75 per cent of American homes with television have been reached. A network of independent stations thus can provide an adequate basis for selling national advertising time.

But there are risks in Murdoch's plan. Independent stations are, by and large, the weakest players in their individual markets. The network owned stations or the stations affiliated with established networks have long held dominion in the markets in which Murdoch wishes to challenge. Moreover, owners of other collections of important independent television stations such as Taft Broadcasting and the Tribune

¹³ The FCC has given Murdoch two years to sell the papers, six months more than the rules require. See *The New York Times*, November 15, 1985, pp D1, D4.

¹⁴ *The Wall Street Journal*, June 21, 1985, p 5.

¹⁵ Technically FCC rules prohibit foreign citizens from owning more than 20 % of a broadcast station and 25 % of a company that owns a station.

¹⁶ *The Washington Post*, May 8, 1985, D2.

¹⁷ These two markets alone account for nearly one seventh of the households with television sets in the United States.

¹⁸ *Broadcasting*, February 10, 1986, p 37; *Electronic Media*, March, 1986, pp 6, 44.

¹⁹ *The Wall Street Journal*, February 21, 1986, p 9; *Business Week*, May 20, 1985, p 106.

Company might turn down Fox shows in favour of trying to mount their own limited networks.

To make Murdoch's plan work, Fox production chief Barry Diller must turn out attractive programming to ensure that stations will buy from Fox. But this will not happen in 1986. Diller has publicly acknowledged that the current Twentieth Century Fox is not up to supplying more than ten to twenty theatrical films plus two or three hours of programmes directly aimed at the television audience.

Twentieth Century Fox has begun to slowly build its capabilities for supplying a new television network. At first it will try for a couple of half-hour situation comedies and then move into longer fare, including so-called action/adventure shows and movies made for television. One series—set for the fall of 1986—is a new version of *9 to 5*, which began first as a hit film and then had a short run on network television. Fox says it will produce a minimum of 26 first-run episodes for each of the next two US television seasons (a total of 52). These will be coupled with the 33 episodes already shown to make a total of 85 shows. A second weekly game show/beauty contest, *Dream Girl U.S.A.*, has 25 half-hour episodes in production. Rumours abound concerning other projects, but realistically, for much of 1986 Barry Diller will have to look to pick up independent projects from outsiders in order to 'instantly' increase Fox's output.¹⁸

Other incentives exist to motivate Fox. Diller is not only programming for traditional US markets but also for Murdoch's Sky Channel which reaches an estimated two million homes in nine European countries. Twentieth Century Fox productions could be beamed at little cost over the satellite and generate additional revenues, assuming that initial programming costs will first be fully recouped through presentation on television stations in the US. For the moment, of course, both Metro-media stations and the Sky Channel can present already completed Twentieth Century Fox movies and television shows to produce pure profit since the costs of these products were written off long ago.¹⁹

The Advantages of Vertical Integration

Simply put, the fate of the fourth network lies with Murdoch taking full advantage of his vertically integrated operation. Fox/Metromedia alone controls a studio for programme creation plus six well-situated television stations to carry its film and television products in the US and a satellite television network to telecast them abroad. The major US television networks still have restrictions on programme production. Moreover among rival Hollywood programme producers, only MCA, Universal's parent company, owns a major television station—and in its case only one.

Vertical integration can be defined as the expansion of a business enterprise by gaining control of operations from the acquisition of fundamental raw materials to the sale of the final product. For film and tele-

vision entertainment a fully vertically integrated system would include the production of the programme, its distribution, and its final presentation.

Two economic motivations are common to all forms of vertical integration. First, businesses desire to take full advantage of the power integration offers to reduce costs of sales and transactions. The vertically integrated corporation sells productions to 'itself' and thus does not have to go through bidding procedures and can have smaller sales and accounting departments.

The second motivation is market control. A vertically integrated firm need not worry about being shut out of key markets. For example, in the past Fox had to convince stations to buy its films and television shows. Marginal shows would fail if a television station in New York or Los Angeles, the two largest United States television markets, did not buy. By vertically integrating, Fox, Inc need not worry about being shut out of New York, Los Angeles, or four other major US media markets.

Motion picture companies have long understood the need to reduce costs and control the outlets through vertical integration. The major Hollywood companies during the so-called 'Golden Age' of the 1930s and '40s produced films, distributed them throughout the world, and owned and operated theatres in major cities in the United States, Canada, Australia, and several European countries. Then, at the end of the '40s, the US Justice Department brought antitrust suits against major movie corporations (including Fox) to force them to sever ownership and control of their US theatres. The theatres were sold during the 1950s, contributing, some have argued, to the demise of the studio system.²⁰

Now that television has firmly replaced the movie theatre as the prime showcase for visual entertainment, it behooves Hollywood to try to control one or more important television stations. MCA surely understood this when it purchased an independent television station (operating within the New York City media market) in January of 1986. As we move toward the 1990s, other major movie corporations will surely purchase one or more television stations. Only the required millions of dollars in purchase price stands in their way. The FCC has made it clear that it will not oppose such mergers. An outsider, Rupert Murdoch, has shown Hollywood that vertical integration of film and television entertainment represents the profitable strategy for the future.

Murdoch's proposed fourth US television network will cost him millions, even billions, but will forever change the face of American television—far more than the vaunted promises of cable television. Cable television has struggled for decades to enter 45 per cent of the homes using television in the US while in one bold move Murdoch seeks access to a national market. It has taken the rich outsider, willing to pay above market prices, to accomplish what no American corporation has been able to do: seriously propose a viable fourth US television network. Murdoch may fail, but not through the lack of resources or government interference.

²⁰ For a summary of how this system worked see Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System*, London, British Film Institute/Macmillan, 1986, pp 11-23.

²¹ On how Hollywood unsuccessfully tried to take over television in the 1940s, see Douglas Gomery, 'Failed Opportunities: The Integration of the US Motion Picture and Television Industries', *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, vol X no 2, Summer 1984, pp 219-228.

Murdoch has also linked Hollywood directly to the television industry for the first time.²¹ As a consequence Hollywood, not directly controlled by the FCC but surely an ally of President Reagan, will grow ever more powerful. Ten years ago it was thought that the emerging world of cable television would cripple Hollywood. Instead the emerging world of new television technologies has simply demonstrated how interested Americans are in watching more and more movies—on pay TV, on superstations, and on video cassette recorders. Rupert Murdoch knew of this demand and was willing to gamble billions on extending Hollywood's domination.

In the past the US federal government through the FCC and the Antitrust Division of the Justice Department provided a firm check on the creation of such integrated corporate empires. It took a market oriented, pro-business Ronald Reagan administration to clear the way for an ambitious, wealthy man like Rupert Murdoch to commit the resources to acquire such an obvious concentration of power. Previously Murdoch's foreign citizenship, and/or his ownership of newspapers in major markets would have virtually guaranteed that he would never get started. But the Reagan FCC has long encouraged a fourth network and in the end served as a cheerleader for Murdoch's project. Indeed, it surely seems that until Reagan steps down from power in 1989, there will be further moves to vertically integrate and thus form greater and greater concentrations of economic power in the television industry in the US.

MURDOCH IS BAD NEWS

Rupert Murdoch made a staggering £47 million profit last year out of the Sun, News of the World, Times and Sunday Times.

He has just bought six American TV companies but he needs even more profits to pay for them.

So Murdoch has provoked a strike to sack over 5,000 British employees – employees who have worked on his papers for years and earned him huge profits.

● Eric worked for the Sun for sixteen years before he was sacked by Rupert Murdoch.

People all over the country have stopped buying Murdoch's papers.

Please do the same.

Then he will have to start negotiating.

© Jeremy Nichol



DON'T BUY

THE Sun NEWS OF THE WORLD

**THE TIMES
THE SUNDAY TIMES**

COMMERCIALISM AND TELEVISION: NOTES ON A NORWEGIAN(?) DILEMMA

BY JOSTEIN GRIPSRUD

¹ *Dagbladet*, March 31 1984. The plan was launched by a committee of representatives from the trade unions, religious organisations and the temperance and amateur sports movements.

1. A new situation

THE FIRST HALF of the 1980s has brought a new dynamic to the public debate on media issues in Norway, a loosening up of traditional principles and a redefinition of old controversies that was hardly conceivable only a few years ago. If anyone in 1979 had predicted that the Norwegian trade union congress would five years later initiate and support a plan for a basically private television network, to be financed by advertising, she or he would have qualified as an idiot in the original sense of the word: a person who knows nothing about politics. Nevertheless, such a plan was front page news in March 1984.¹

Even if this particular initiative did not lead to anything concrete, it is indicative of the new situation in several ways. Politically, it reflects a general breakthrough for the liberalising broadcasting policies of the conservative government in power since 1981. A main point in the proposal was that a second TV channel should not be administered by NRK, the public broadcasting monopoly since 1933. Technologically, the plan was based on the rapidly expanding cable systems and their sky-high collaborators – the communications satellites. The cables of predominantly co-operative housing in suburban areas had hitherto been used to bring Swedish public television to a great number of homes in the eastern parts of Norway. But satellites transmitting commercial programmes from England and the continent was about to give cable quite another significance. Culturally, then, the initiative of the trade unions and three other mass organisations was aimed at coping with an entirely new degree of *internationalisation* and *commercialisation* of the broadcasting media – and consequently of the public sphere and cultural life in general. Resistance to international commercial mass culture is a

tradition of various Norwegian popular movements, and the indicated willingness to meet the slightly demonised challenge by implementing some of its elements for a better purpose represented a decidedly new twist to the issue.

The purpose of the following is to have a closer look at some of the aspects of this 'Faustian' strategy in the politics of television. I would like to stress that the criss-crossing of economical, technological, political and cultural forces in this field makes for a complexity that precludes simple solutions. Most of all, the situation calls for a combination of bold creativity and unabashed *Realpolitik* not easily attained by traditional representatives of the cultural elite—or radical politics, for that matter. And it should be remembered that the problems in this field are not in principle 'Norwegian', even if the Norwegian case does have certain historical and political peculiarities. The opening sentence of a report to the French Ministry of Culture in 1983 was: 'Deregulation and growing internationalization: these two features mark out the contemporary evolution of communication and information systems, particularly television.'²

One of the main points of the French report is that the rupture of the traditional systems of communication must be understood in terms of deep structural changes in the western economy. Nicholas Garnham has put it like this:

*This proliferation of potential channels is not a response to consumer demand but the result both of the search of multi-national hardware manufacturers for new markets, and of the industrial and economic strategies of various governments. All OECD governments have identified the electronics/information sector as the key to future international competitiveness and prosperity—as the engine to pull their economies out of their current crisis of stagnation and unemployment. Thus each country argues that (almost whatever the cultural consequences) it must lay a cable system, or launch a direct broadcasting satellite, as a base from which to launch its assault on the world export market, and as part of the necessary infrastructure of the hoped-for information economy.*³

Although I find Garnham's total rejection of 'consumer demand' questionable, especially in a Norwegian context, his main points are vital to an understanding of the situation. First, the development of satellite and cable technology is consistent with the earlier developments of radio and television technologies with regard to the characteristics formulated by Raymond Williams: 'It is not only that the supply of broadcasting facilities preceded the demand; it is that the means of communication preceded their content.'⁴ Second, Garnham's sketch of the general economic framework points to the enormously powerful economic and political forces creating today's situation. The question is to what extent these forces also will and/or should define the contents of the new means of communication. Investigating the concept of 'commercialism' in this area is crucial to any attempt to an answer.

² Quoted in Armand Mattelart, Xavier Delcourt and Michelle Mattelart, *International Image Markets*, London, Comedia, 1984, p ix.

³ Nicholas Garnham, 'Introduction' in Mattelart et al, op cit, p 2.

⁴ Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, New York, Schocken Books, 1975, p 25.

2. Commercialism in public television

⁵ Nick Browne, 'The Political Economy of the Television (Super) Text', *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, Summer 1984, vol 9 no 3, p 175.

⁶ The 1935 compromise between Det Norske Arbeiderparti (the social democrats) and Bondepartiet (the 'Farmers' Party') made way for a social democratic regime that lasted for nearly 30 years.

⁷ *Dagbladet*, January 15 1985.

⁸ *Dagbladet*, August 16 1984.

In the United States, 'the business of television is showing ads to audiences', as Nick Browne argues, quoting the slogan of the Nielsen ratings: 'The Industry Standard for Buying, Selling, Planning, and Programming National Television.' In the US there is no ground for contrasting commercialism and television: television is the epitome of commercialism in cultural production. This is why Browne maintains that any analysis of American television must take account of 'the direct role of economy in shaping the form of American television texts'.⁵

In most European countries, and especially the Scandinavian, the US situation has been regarded as a somewhat exotic cultural disaster – until quite recently. Not only has one country after another opened up the possibilities for financing television services by advertising, the proliferation of available channels has in itself introduced *the logic of commercial broadcasting* into the minds of broadcasting professionals at public service institutions that do not carry advertisements at all. This logic also seems to prevail in the public debate on broadcasting issues, as it is represented by the printed media. Norway provides a perfect example.

The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, NRK, can be seen as an incarnation of the popular enlightenment ideals of the major mass movements of the first half of this century, its formation in 1933 anticipating the grand parliamentary compromise two years later between agricultural/rural interests and the labour movement.⁶ NRK's *raison d'être* was that it could function as an instrument for the equal distribution of knowledge and 'high quality' culture. (The standards defining what knowledge and culture were worthy of distribution were never really disputed.)

Thus the radical change implied when, for example, an NRK producer of television entertainment refers to his audience as 'customers', and mentions *one* ambition governing the design of a particular programme: 'We wish to prevent people switching to Sweden or Sky Channel.'⁷ This strategy of prevention was implemented by launching a 3½ hour copy of commercial television 'flow', including advertisements for non-commercial organisations and generally accepted 'causes' (health, traffic safety, etc).

The Programme Director of NRK-TV, Otto Nes, declared a new orientation towards the 'wishes of the audience' in 1984.⁸ Admittedly there is still some way to go before one reaches the standpoint of the Reagan-appointed head of the US Federal Communications Commission, who is reputed to have said that 'the public interest is what interests the public'. And I for my part have less nostalgia for traditional patronising attitudes than many scholarly bearers of Cultural Responsibility. But the main point here remains: commercial logic is pervasive within public television already. Otto Nes said in a recent interview:

There should be more swing to what we're doing... Pure entertainment

*will have more room as competition over viewers increases, and we haven't been good enough at meeting the new challenge at this point [Pointing towards a shelf full of reports from NRK's audience research] We must also get better at using these reports when we're making programmes*⁹

It should be added, however, that Nes also sees NRK's unique capacity for producing Norwegian newscasts as a particularly strong asset in the corporation's future struggle for viewers.¹⁰ Still, the impression remains that an 'international', i.e. commercial, form of entertainment is considered the main reply to increased competition: this is the area where programming policy will be *changed*.

But commercialism also influences the public monopoly in another way, maybe less conceivable to the greater part of the audience. Not only are series, films and other programmes imported—so are programme formats and aesthetics—the standards for 'good television'. The latest import is the US talk-show format, in a somewhat modified Johnny Carson style, with comedy monologues substituting for commercials in the rhythm of the programme. And for a year or two now, NRK has been running advertisements for its own programmes. More fundamentally, commercial television functions as a model with respect to NRK's organisation of content and visual presentation.

The *segmentalisation* that several theorists see as fundamental to broadcast TV as a cultural form is increasing on NRK. With the exemption of Monday's feature film and Tuesday's theatrical plays, practically every programme now seems constructed according to a system of interchangeable parts, rarely exceeding five minutes in length. This structure, based in part on assumptions concerning the audience's patience and ability to concentrate, may be explained in different ways. But it is historically linked to commercial television's way of dealing with its primary concern: preventing viewers from changing channels or simply turning off their sets.¹¹ Increasing segmentalisation means increases in pace, variety and surprise-effects of different sorts. These values also guide the present developments in *visual style*—marked by a shorter duration of shots, the electronic manipulation of images and more spectacular *mise-en-scène*. The entertainment programme *Lordagssirkus* ('Saturday Circus'), introduced in the autumn season of 1984, is an obvious example of these new tendencies. This programme's link to commercialism was also clear at other levels—from the logo/trademark repeated a dozen times through the show to its thematic preoccupation with fashion, the fashionable and the officially non-commercial marketing of new cultural products like LPs, books, theatre performances and Oslo cafés.

On the other hand, and this is a crucial point, *Lordagssirkus* was in many ways an example of excellent craftsmanship characterised by its specifically *televisual* mode of presentation. It was not just radio with images, and certainly not cinema, it was television's own *montage* of taped material, live reportage, live studio performance and electronic effects—with precarious coherence established by the graphic trademark

⁹ *Aftenposten*, December 28 1985. (Since the Norwegian song 'Let It Swing' won the Eurovision Song Contest in 1985, 'swing' has come to stand for anything that can be related to the present financial boom, the international success of 'Norwegian' products—or the Norwegian success of international products.)

¹⁰ See the Belgian example cited by Mattelart et al, *op cit*, p 29.

¹¹ See John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982, p 115.

and its hostesses in a studio where a starry sky seemed to be the only limit.

The craftsmanship involved here is at its best in television advertising. 'The "spot" advertisement is in many ways the quintessence of TV'. John Ellis writes in *Visible Fictions*:

*Watching advertisements is often an exhilarating experience because of their short span and their intensity of meaning: they are expensive (more expensive than the programmes they come with) and precisely calculated (often better than TV drama). They are sparkingly diverse, the shiny surface wrapping of a domestically oriented consumerist society. They are also the supremely televisual product: hence another part of the exhilaration, that of seeing a medium used for itself, and not weighed down by cultural presumptions that are not its own.*¹²

3. The meaning of a second Norwegian channel

It is a telling fact that very few, if any, seem to question the necessity of a second Norwegian channel. Two main reasons are normally given. First, the need is said to arise from the threat to Norwegian culture and cultural identity represented by the international commercial channels. Second, it is motivated by a wish to improve Norwegian television through competition and increased possibilities of 'consumer choice', thereby presumably adding to the general quality of Norwegian culture and everyday life. Conservatives tend to emphasise the latter argument, others the former ('cultural identity'), but both are generally accepted as valid. The main issues of the public debate are therefore (1) whether or not the second channel should be organised within NRK, and (2) whether or not the new channel should be financed by advertising to a greater or lesser extent.

The NRK offered last year to launch a second channel, with no advertising, for an extra 400 Norwegian *kroner* (approximately £40) per household per year, an approximately 50 per cent increase in the license fee now paid.¹³ The price is surprisingly low, being equivalent to the rent paid for ten films on video cassette. Instead the three main objections to another NRK channel concern the *kind of TV* that would come out of it. The first represents the sentiments of large sections of the Norwegian audience, who long for a light entertainment channel. The second, based on traditional Norwegian regionalism and decentralising ideals, and also linked to the economic interests of financially strong local print media, offers a strong current of scepticism. The third is provided by a new concern for *diversity* as a cultural and political value in itself. This is not only a part of conventional liberal right rhetoric. As Armand Mattelart and his colleagues have put it, the international proliferation of channels has 'exposed the way in which the public service finds it difficult to satisfy the demand of users whose fragmented interests conflict with a public monopoly's mass audience profile'.¹⁴ Referring to his negative impression of NRK's two radio channels, the composer Olav Anton

¹² *ibid*, p 118.

¹³ *Dagbladet*, January 30 1985.

¹⁴ Armand Mattelart et al, *op cit*, p 28.

Thommessen in November 1984 voiced the interests of intellectuals and artists in specialised channels, or at least a clustering of programmes addressing specific audience groups—primarily his own.¹⁵ Thommessen's article reflects a relatively new, but growing frustration with NRK's broad, all-embracing profile, especially among those we may loosely term intellectuals. This complements the frustration with the institution's popular enlightenment ideals expressed in a number of ways by other groups.

The introduction of a second Norwegian television channel would challenge the very structure of the Norwegian public sphere, symbolised and sustained by the traditional one-channel system of broadcasting. (The second radio channel opened only a couple of years ago.) The political and cultural consequences of this fragmentation of the public sphere are difficult to predict. They depend not only on the broadcasting policies pursued, but more fundamentally on the social development in general—and on initiatives taken in the *cultural field as a whole*.

Extra resources should be provided in two educational fields: the training of media producers and the training of 'audience educators'. In addition to this, extra resources should be allocated to the cultural sector in general, in order to stimulate diversified cultural production. This is the prerequisite of diversified quality production in any *special* field or medium—and of the universally hailed freedom of expression. It is the will to accept such additional measures and costs in the wake of increased television output that distinguishes a democratically and culturally responsible policy, more than the stand taken in the Norwegian public debate so far.

The opening of a new TV channel would also mean an enormous increase in the demand for televisual material. NRK is presently transmitting approximately 2400 hours of television per year, and a new channel implies at least a doubling of this figure.¹⁶ Some of this space should in any organisational model be reserved for *independent Norwegian producers*—be it organisations, institutions, private firms or film and video artists. The proliferation of channels should be accompanied by a proliferation of producers. As the director of the British Channel 4, Jeremy Isaacs, has said:

*Broadcasters see too much of each other. They drink in the same bars, eat in the same restaurants, initiate each other's professionalism, take in each other's washing. Channel 4 screens film and video by workers outside the system who do not share the attitudes or the practices of professional film and television-makers. They work in new forms. They see the world from perspectives different from those of the production centres of BBC or ITV.*¹⁷

The possibility of attaining a channel open to differing perspectives along lines like this, outweighs in my view some of the scruples one might have concerning (partial) financing by advertisements. As I have argued, commercial influences will mark the future of television in any case.

¹⁵ *Dagbladet*, November 24 1984.

¹⁶ *Dagbladet*, January 30 1985.

¹⁷ Quoted in Armand Mattelart, et al, op cit, p 104.

¹⁸ *Dagbladet*, January 4 1986.

¹⁹ Terje Mosnes, *Dagbladet*, September 8 1984.

²⁰ Helle Alro et al, 'Reklamer i Vesttysk TV', *Masse Kultur et Medier* 12, vol 4 no 3, 1984, p 73.

4. Do advertisements make a difference?

'It is an absolute condition that it—advertising—should be clearly separated from the editorial material, and sent in "blocks". That is the way it is with most European channels that carry commercials,' argued the Norwegian Minister of Culture, Lars Roar Langslet recently. His optimism as to the effects of advertising on programming seems naive, to say the least: 'I think we can boil the whole problem down to the question whether we'd rather want most of the money spent on direct mail advertising used for quality television.'¹⁸

This kind of naivety is often matched by a similar oversimplification on the side of those who reject advertising on television. They take it for granted that a channel carrying commercials will be totally dominated by commercial interests:

What the contents of programmes can't accomplish, the commercials will. Together they're dynamite. And those who wish to set the premises, because their interests are served by a TV-doped, can't-stand-politics-population, will have their great day. Big and smaller merchants selling everything from the latest trend in jeans to racism and egotism, will have the channels of communication at their disposal.

According to Mosnes, any attempt at imposing certain moral or cultural standards on commercial television will be futile: 'Those who still believe that the Christian People's Party will be the guarantor for the ethical/moral standards of a Norwegian commercial television, are cordially invited to meet Santa Claus in the Parliament's restaurant on Friday first at 5 pm precisely.'¹⁹

One might try to approach the problem by having a closer look at the West German model, which is often referred to in the debate. Advertisements first appeared in West German television in 1956, restricted to six minutes of commercial spots between 7.30 and 8 pm. The advertisement revenues were then supposed to be used for general cultural purposes.²⁰ But this practice gradually disappeared, and advertisement revenues are now a vital part of television economy. In 1981, they amounted to 31.8 per cent of ARD's income, 40.5 per cent of ZDF's.

Since 1961, when the West German channel ZDF (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen) was established, there have been regulations limiting the time for advertisements to 20 minutes per weekday on average. There is no advertising on Sundays and holidays. Advertisements are to be clearly separated from the programmes they come with, grouped in 'blocks' between programmes. It is interesting to note that even though the advertisements are aired according to a strict schedule, this schedule is not published with the ordinary listings of programmes in newspapers, etc. The audience is not, so to speak, 'warned off'. Also, both ARD and ZDF have their own advertising agencies or companies, who not only edit the commercial 'blocks' but also programme the period between 6 and 8 pm, when advertisements are transmitted.

Consequently, the early evening programming has a special profile: it consists of news and entertainment. The following example from ZDF (April 4, 1984) shows this profile, but also reveals how the restrictions on breaking up programmes are evaded:

17.00 *News*
 17.15 *Entertainment magazine*
 17.46 *Advertisements*
 17.51 **Brett Maverick (1)**
 18.16 *Newspaper headlines*
 18.17 *Advertisements*
 18.25 **Brett Maverick (2)**
 18.49 *Advertisements*
 18.58 *Programme trailers*
 19.00 *News*
 19.20 *Advertisements*
 19.29 *Tonight's programme*

The one-minute presentation of newspaper headlines is obviously only inserted to legitimate a commercial 'block' in the middle of the US *Maverick* episode, lasting for more than seven minutes.

The German example is interesting in at least three ways: first, it indicates that programming leading up to and surrounding the advertisements is clearly influenced by the advertiser's interests. Second, it shows how easily regulations as to the separation of commercials from the ordinary programme are evaded. But third, it demonstrates that it has been possible to keep the commercials in the given, restricted space (before 8 pm) for 25 years, in spite of pressures from advertisers to open up the rest of the evening to them. This remains true, even if ZDF in 1973 moved their evening prime-time scheduling from 7.45 pm to 7, partly in order to deliver larger audiences to advertisers. The point is that there is no *automatic* expansion of advertising and the typical programming to go with it once it is given a certain space. Such expansion remains a political issue.

The current tendency in Europe is, however, that measures are taken to make advertising in television more attractive. In Holland, for instance, whose system has been more or less similar to the German, it is now proposed that regulations are changed to allow for advertising between *all* programmes, and to abandon the principle that advertisements should be explicitly announced as such.²¹

An important conclusion to be drawn from both the West German and the Dutch examples is that advertising is a fundamentally *unreliable* source of income for predominantly non-commercial television. The advertiser's cost-benefit analysis does not necessarily turn out in favour of television as a medium for commercial communication. A television totally dependent on advertising revenues must be prepared to adjust to the advertiser's demands. Hence the importance of what the Danish media researcher Preben Sepstrup has called 'the electronic dilemma of TV advertising'. There is evidence that the effect of TV advertising is

²¹ *Information*
 (Denmark), February
 3 1986.

²² *Information* (Denmark), February 10 1986.

²³ Michael Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society*, New York, Basic Books, 1984, p 3.

²⁴ *Kringkastingsreklame*, Nou, 1984, no 5, p 114.

declining, due to audiences' technologically increased possibilities for avoiding ads, including more channels to switch to by pressing a button on the remote control, and the increasing spread of video recorders which make it possible to skip the commercials when watching a taped programme. Research in a number of countries is said to indicate that 20 to 30 per cent of a programme's viewers leave the room during a commercial break, and a similar percentage stay in the room but direct their attention away from the set. According to several reports, 20 to 50 per cent of audiences say that they switch channels when a commercial break occurs.²² If these figures are at all reliable, one is tempted to ask if advertisements are watched at all? The appeal of pay-TV cable networks in the United States which do not carry commercials points in the same direction: audiences tend to avoid commercials if possible, and this particularly affects the economic possibilities of a channel where advertisements come in separate 'blocks' that may last up to ten minutes.

These aspects of the advertising issue point to an interesting split of interests between advertising agencies, especially those that are multi-national and have stacks of commercial spots ready for import, and the businesses they are supposed to serve. The advertising agencies are not happy about facts like this:

*... on average, less than 25 per cent of a television audience can remember an ad they saw on television the day before, even when prodded with various clues. Unprodded, about 9 per cent of viewers can name the brand or product category they saw advertised on television immediately before answering the phone call from the market researcher.*²³

But this is crucial information to industrialists and policy-makers alike.

Some of the premises of the political decision on the question of advertising on Norwegian television were established in a report to the Norwegian Ministry of Culture on the broadcasting media, presented in 1984. The report recommends that advertisements on TV should come in blocks 3-6 minutes in length, inserted between any programmes at any time of day except children's programmes, and limited to 20 minutes per day and 6 minutes per programme hour. This is, in other words, a model more liberal than the present West German, even if the number of blocks per day is *recommended* to be limited to 5 per day. In addition to this, the report explicitly argues that the commercial blocks should *not* come at specified, previously announced hours. That would 'impair programming and reduce the efficiency of the advertising medium'.²⁴ This consideration for the efficiency of advertisements not only reflects the interests of advertisers. It reflects the necessity of making television an attractive alternative to other advertising media once it is decided to finance programmes by advertising revenues.

5. Final questions

The first question to be answered is *whether or not we want or need a*

second television channel. I am myself definitely in favour of this, for a number of reasons. The most important of these is that a second channel means an *opportunity* for *real* diversity, simply by providing more space to be filled. If sensible measures are taken to ensure it, a second channel may increase the chances that new producers, new perspectives may be presented to viewers, not just an increased output of international merchandise. This could suggest an answer to the second crucial question, *whether or not the second channel should be run by NRK*: it probably should not, even if some form of co-operation is necessary. It is precisely a challenge to NRK centralism and mainstream professionalism that should be one of the primary objectives of a second channel.

The third question is *whether or not advertising is necessary to finance a second channel of this sort.* There are reasons to doubt this, as it first and foremost depends on political decisions and the population's will to pay extra to avoid advertisements. At present, however, a majority seem to prefer advertising to a considerable rise in the license fee. The fourth question is *whether or not advertising makes a difference on programming.* As I have tried to show, the general tendency is that it does. That is why I would prefer a West German model, restricting advertisements to a certain time period. But the difference that advertising might make should not be exaggerated. Not only is commercialism pervasive within Norwegian society and media already, but there is also evidence that TV channels financed by advertising still may produce highly 'respectable' programmes in any sense of the phrase. Even more interesting, Britain's Channel 4 also shows that a channel carrying advertisements may produce programmes intended for *particular*, not necessarily very large, audiences: 'narrowcasting'.

This phenomenon requires an extra comment. The US television networks are aware that their attractiveness as advertising media are seriously affected by their lack of appeal to important parts of the population:

ABC's research reveals that 16 per cent of the population, core culture-aficionados, do not watch television very much at all. These elusive folk – 'light watchers' – are also better educated and richer than the population generally. A further 24 per cent are described as 'culturally receptive' – active PTA members and the like, who watch 60 Minutes and network news but give television a low priority. Together these make a sizable, largely untapped universe.²⁵

Yet to be commercially viable, 'narrowcasting' may depend on an existing 'broadcasting' channel that carries advertisements to the 'masses'. A channel addressing special segments of the population gives advertisers potential access to these segments, but it seems probable that Norwegian advertisers, for instance, with the enormous cost of TV advertising, would still have to concentrate on the broad, general audience that might switch to Sweden or Sky Channel when 'special interest' programmes were aired. In other words, the existence of

²⁵ Brian Winston, 'Showdown at Culture Gulch', in R E Hiebert and C Reuss (eds), *Impact of Mass Media: Current Issues*, White Plains, NY, Longman, 1985, (originally published in 1981), p 474.

Channel 4 not only presupposes the larger, more heterogeneous British population/market, but also the existence of ITV. This makes it highly improbable that a Norwegian Channel 2 can be envisaged as a parallel to the British Channel 4.

The fifth and final question to be considered here, is *whether or not television advertising is a desirable new aspect of Norwegian culture*. Is it a significant contribution to the growth of 'consumerism' and the values to go with it? The American sociologist Michael Schudson, who has a critical but relatively relaxed attitude to advertising in general, has said that advertising is capitalism's way of saying 'I love you' to itself.²⁶ Advertising may only reinforce existing dispositions in society and its members, but it also suggests that real needs and anxieties can be remedied through the purchasing of certain products. Advertising on television gives *more* room to that sort of message. This is in itself hardly desirable. But, within politically imposed limits, advertising may financially contribute to a necessary challenging of the hitherto monolithic structure of Norwegian television.

This article was presented at a conference at the University of Oslo on 'The Mass Media and the Humanities', March 1986.

FILMING LITERATURE: The Art of Screen Adaptation

Neil Sinyard

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Tom Ryall

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WHOSE PUBLIC SERVICE? A RESPONSE TO THE PEACOCK COMMITTEE ON FINANCING THE BBC

BY JANET WHYATT
(FOR THE CAMPAIGN FOR
PRESS AND BROADCASTING FREEDOM
BROADCASTING COMMITTEE)

The Peacock Committee has been told to investigate the cost and benefit of funding the BBC through the licence fee or by other means, such as advertising, sponsorship or subscription. Professor Alan Peacock and members of his team have expressed surprise and disappointment at the level of debate. They complain that sectional groups such as advertising agencies and trades unions have only voiced their vested interests, ignoring the wider implications of their proposals for change. This is not surprising. A government-appointed Committee which sets out to look at how public service broadcasting is financed, without examining what it is expected to deliver, should expect to receive submissions based on the commercial gain or loss to various sectors within the public service broadcasting system.

The Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom has adopted a different approach, attempting to re-define public service and then work out appropriate funding arrangements. Public service broadcasting can be defined in broader terms than the Reithian maxim 'inform, educate and entertain'. It should provide accurate news and detailed analysis of events and issues that affect people's daily lives, together with a range of popular cultural material to stimulate and entertain all sections of society. These should be universally available at low cost, and free to people on low incomes such as pensioners, single parents and other claimants.

The question is: should all sections of society

be expected to enjoy the same forms of mass entertainment or show interest in the same news/current affairs formula? If not – if there is no critical mass of listeners/viewers who share the same tastes and information needs – then *broadcasting* becomes a misnomer and we must aim to *narrowcast*, targeting specific interest groups and abandoning established TV and radio practices. This would not be a new departure. It would follow the pattern of change across the short history of British broadcasting.

The BBC began as one wireless channel, branched into regional broadcasting, split the Home Service and the Light Programme then split again into Radio 1, 2, 3 and 4. Meanwhile, 33 BBC Local Radio stations have diversified the service still further. Now there are plans for Radio 5 – a shared service linking local and regional output in a nationwide network. Independent Local Radio followed, then Community Radio and soon there will be independent National Radio. Television has also proliferated. There are now 15 ITV companies as well as BBC1, BBC2, Channel 4 and S4C (the Welsh Fourth Channel). These last two are home to hundreds of small independent production companies which are breaking down the traditional barriers between broadcast television, cinema, community and art film and video. The ITV companies are arrayed in a regional structure roughly matched by the BBC regions. So there is already a local/regional/national service offered by the BBC/IBA system.

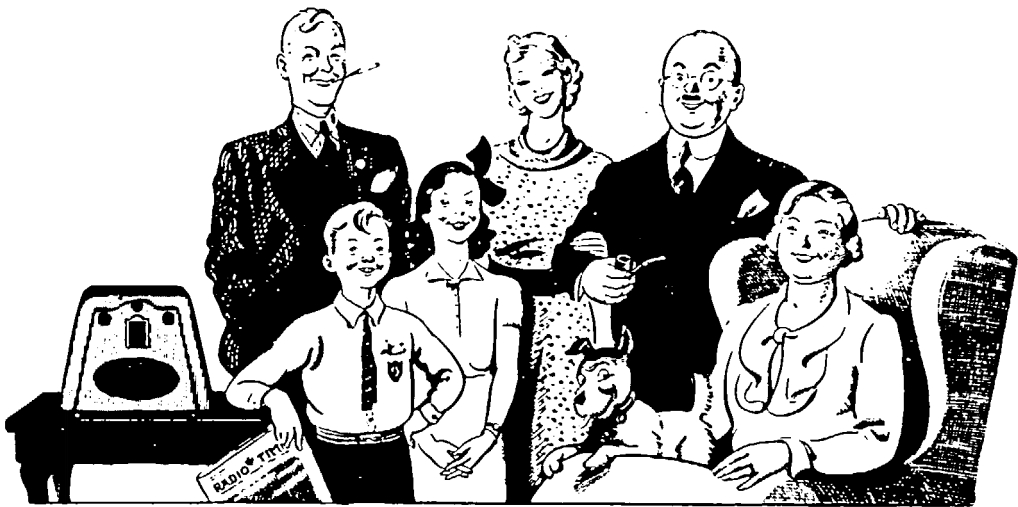
Cable and satellite potentially extend the coverage deeper into the locality and wider across the globe.

This increasing range of broadcast services stretches out across time as well as space. Video cassette recorders enable individual viewers to watch programmes scheduled at the same time. (Though evidence from the National Consumer Council suggests that most VCR users record far more programmes than they have time to watch.¹) Even before the VCR, the total hours of broadcast programming available to the consumer with a simple TV set and radio had been steadily growing. In the 1930s the BBC used to observe a 'toddlers' truce' at the end of children's programming each evening. It ceased transmitting for half an hour to enable parents to drag their children away from the set and off to bed. BBC Radio used to observe the Lord's Day, too, with a ban on dance band music or variety shows on Sunday. Now there is 24-hour radio across the Independent network and Sunday is the day of the pop chart shows on BBC and commercial radio. There are two breakfast TV channels, daytime TV and educational broadcasts (Open University and programmes transmitted for recording in schools) through the small hours. Satellite receivers bring the possibility of 24-hour live viewing and of course videos are available to watch at any time.

So British TV and radio are following a long-standing trend towards greater diversity and availability. This process began in pioneer spirit, as the BBC pushed back the frontiers of technology and sought to win new audiences. Groups were identified as targets for specialist programmes, clearly labelled and deliberately scheduled at certain times (*Listen with Mother* and later *Watch with Mother*, *Music While You Work*, and so on). Nowadays this process is fuelled by the BBC's need for high total audience figures (to justify the level of the licence fee) and proof that new audiences are being served in new ways (to justify the Corporation's expansion into new technologies and outlets). It is matched by the commercial broadcasters' quest for new markets and by social and political changes which affect the role of public service broadcasting.

Mass unemployment means less ability to pay for trips to the cinema, theatres or concerts and increased leisure for viewing and listening. The nuclear family is no longer the norm and neither is the stereotype of mother, father and their two children gathered round the wireless or TV for

¹ *TV and the Future - the Viewers' View*, Consumers Association, 14 Buckingham Street, London WC2, February 1984.



The family audience: *Radio Times* illustration, April 15 1938.

102 family entertainment in the home. Politically, the post-war consensus is gone. Divided Britain, driven by a Conservative cult of the self-made individual, is ripe for narrowcasting as never before.

Advertisers are keen to exploit this mood, and the present government is keen to help them. Already it has introduced the possibility of advertising on the BBC; it has allowed the IBA to use a 'lighter touch' in regulating the commercial radio sector and to sanction the use of split frequency to broadcast mass-entertainment and minority programming simultaneously²; it has set up a Cable Authority to exercise the bare minimum of commercial regulation and legalised home satellite receivers with no control over what is received. Altogether, the effect has been to increase the number of commercially-funded options, each tending to specialise in terms of the geography of its catchment area or community of interest, or ability to pay.

This has been welcomed as an overdue move towards breaking the hegemony of the broadcasting establishment. Seen from the left, the BBC is elitist, London-biased, politically pro-establishment and closely linked with the security services MI5 and Special Branch. As such, it discourages access and participation and its range of programming is limited. Seen from the right, it is anti-government, bureaucratic, spendthrift and self-indulgent. As such, it is cocooned from market forces and out of touch with the demands of consumers. Both perspectives lead to a view that the BBC should be broken up into smaller, self-financed units. The right calls it *privatisation*, the left *liberalisation*. It is a strange convergence, but not unique.

An analogy can be drawn with the National Health Service.... Like the BBC, the NHS is perceived as paternalistic, staffed by professionals who too often believe themselves infallible. Academic requirements for entry are high; the training is long, technological and expensive. The professionals are predominantly white, male and middle class and impose middle-class values. Allocation of resources within the service is bureaucratic, racist, sexist and anti-working class. Nationally the service is not accountable; locally its authorities are under the thumb of accountants and administrators.

Professional incompetence and malpractice is dealt with internally, with the professional bodies policing the ethics of their own members. The effect of all this is to create a professional mystique, distancing people from the service that is funded by them equally and is supposed to serve them all equally.

Just as a doctor will trust her or his judgement rather than the patient's version, so a BBC news presenter will choose to speak to a BBC reporter at the scene of the event rather than an eyewitness. The doctor feels no pain and the reporter probably arrived hours after the incident happened. But professions are self-serving – if people could stay healthy on their own, or had direct access to means of mass communication, doctors and broadcasters would be endangered species.

In recent years there has been a grass-roots revolt against the bureaucracy and elitism of the medical establishment. Alternative health care, and self-help groups of all kinds have proliferated. Some have penetrated the mainstream of the health service – acupuncture is now available on the NHS and some Well Women Centres are publicly funded. However, the vast majority of these new ventures are run as businesses – wholefood co-operatives, herbal medicine manufacturers, commercial health clubs, private clinics and so on. The challenge to conventional health care has been commercialised. Meanwhile the government has been cutting back and privatising the NHS – allowing the new health care industry to fill some of the gaps.

Compare this with the challenge to the BBC/IBA from pirate and community radio, independent producers and so on. They sprang from a radical urge to challenge the mystique of the professional broadcaster and the 'great and the good' of the broadcasting establishment. What happened? The Tories stole the clothes of the radical left, profiting from the electorate's readiness to criticise the NHS and the public service broadcasting system. They offered Care in the Community as a response to the legitimate charge that the NHS institutionalises mental patients and elderly people, failing to meet their

² IBA press release, 'Independent Local Radio: the IBA's Forward Plans', November 12 1984.

needs as individuals within the community. They offered Community Radio in answer to accusations that the BBC and IBA had failed to meet the needs of minority interest groups and geographic localities.

These were presentational ploys, marketed in the same spirit as Norman Tebbit's claim that his anti-union laws had 'given back the unions to their individual members by removing the power of their bureaucracies'. In reality, Care in the Community means major cuts in NHS patient care, shifting the burden from public service to private individuals and families, saving millions of pounds of public money from Health and Social Services, and removing tens of thousands of (predominantly female) unpaid carers from the labour market or the unemployment register. Of course there are private nursing homes for those who can afford them, and the government has relaxed the regulations which control these homes. For the rest, there are few resources and back-up staff to provide true community care.

In the same way, Community Radio will rely on voluntary workers to provide programming that differs from BBC and Independent Local Radio. Meanwhile ILR is being steadily de-regulated, under pressure from the Independent Radio Contractors who fear competition for scarce advertising revenue from the new community stations.

Their fears are justified. Home Office Minister Giles Shaw told the Radio Academy last February that the aim of Community Radio is to 'give the small businessman (sic) an opportunity to advertise on radio at a price he can afford'. These initiatives, Community Care and Community Radio, are a sop to the dispossessed in a wholesale privatisation of major national public services. Channel 4 can be seen in the same light. Already, following the government's refusal to grant the BBC a £65 licence fee, the Corporation's managers are privatising cleaning, catering, clerical and security services and buying in up to 20 per cent of programmes from independent producers. This matches the pattern of privatisation and contracting-out in the hospitals.

The trades unions in the NHS and BBC are prepared to fight for jobs and services. They must also be prepared to fight for the principle of public service – and not the current practice. The National Health Service was created to give

everyone equal access to free health care: the principle of universality. It is the same principle which applies to public service broadcasting.

Any broadcasting system which limits access to any part of its programming – geographically through transmission area, cabling or satellite footprint, economically through subscription or pay-TV, or physically by scrambling the broadcast signal – breaches this principle of universality. Narrowcasting works against the public service ideal. Its perceived virtue is that it enables minority interests to be catered for in a mass communication medium. It frees ethnic and cultural minorities from political, linguistic, musical and religious imperialism. But in fact the experience of narrowcasting to date has been that specialists programmes are scheduled at times and on channels when they do not interrupt the flow of mass entertainment: ghetto slots.

A privatised broadcasting system will provide narrowcasting for the minorities with money – those which are attractive to advertisers. For example, BBC Radio 3 has long been a highly specialised Community of Interest station for lovers of classical music and poetry. It offers advertisers a tightly-targeted group of social classes ABC1. Advertising agencies such as Saatchi and Saatchi, who have been vocal in the Peacock debate, claim that this potential for targeting upmarket groups is exactly what their clients need. Where does that leave minority interests without a high disposable income? Or women, who are technically a majority of the population? Will there be enough soap powder manufacturers to support daytime television stations with a wide range of quality programming of interest to women? Will small businesses abandon local newspapers and sink money into ethnic minority broadcasting? If they do not, and public service is abandoned, we shall be left with a more elitist, divisive system than before: broadcasting for businessmen.

Narrowcasting based on advertising revenue has proved a failure, according to research carried out by Professor Andrew Ehrenburg and Patrick Barwise of the London Business School.³ In the USA, with a fragmented commercial broadcasting system, only the Christian

³ Andrew Ehrenburg, 'The Reach of TV Channels', *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, vol 1, 1984.

104 evangelical and Hispanic channels reach a homogeneous audience. Barwise contends that TV and radio are like newspapers and fulfil their potential as mass communicators by providing a bundle of different specialisms at low cost. They are more than the sum of their parts because the newspaper/TV channel/radio station develops its own identity, which boosts consumer loyalty and the credibility of the information and opinions offered. Thus a consumer may buy a newspaper for its crossword or sports coverage—where he or she would not buy a book of crosswords or a specialist sport magazine. But that does not stop him or her reading the news or the fashion pages as well. The flaw in this analysis is that newspapers operate in a largely deregulated market. Each paper offers a range of information and entertainment, but the ownership of newspapers is concentrated in the hands of a few multi-national, multi-media corporations. This severely limits the political and cultural diversity of the printed media.

For true diversity of the press and broadcasting, regulation is essential. The current British arrangements have proved inappropriate. Re-regulation is required. In broadcasting, the public service element must be retained because the free market will neglect vast sections of the community in its quest for upmarket consumers. Commercial broadcasting was once a licence to print money. It is still a lucrative business in certain regions. The Levy on ITV profits and exports could be removed from the Treasury coffers—where it goes to fund tax cuts or nuclear weaponry—and diverted into subsidies for new community TV channels or radio stations, or enfranchised, independent production companies. Why only Channel 4? Why not dozens of new media? Properly regulated, with controls against monopoly ownership, commercial broadcasters could enrich the diversity of the British media. The BBC's licence

fee could be reorganised so that the wealthy pay more (for example, for two TV sets and two car radios) and those on low incomes pay less. Extra services may be run on a commercial basis—after all, the NHS does not offer face-lifts or silicon breast implants—and people may wish to pay for extra TV channels or subscribe to specialist music radio stations. But these too must be kept within the regulatory framework as additions to, not substitutes for, the public service broadcasting system funded by licence fee, regulated advertising and levy on profits. New *elected* national and local broadcasting authorities could improve accountability and determine the allocation of resources, ensuring that regional and minority interests were better served. The aim should be a public service broadcasting system which provides a core of basic information, news, current affairs and investigative journalism with an excellent range of programmes to entertain all sections of society.

None of this will happen without a major public campaign embracing the broadcasting unions, independent producers, academic researchers, campaigning organisations and individual viewers and listeners. Already there is public concern that the 'free market' is free only in commercial terms. Conservative MP Winston Churchill Jr recently sought to extend censorship through the Obscene Publications Act to cover TV and radio. The Home Office, having created a deregulated Community Radio experiment, plans to bring radio stations under the provisions of the new Public Order legislation, giving the police power to stop 'politically subversive' broadcasting on the new stations.

This is not regulation: it is repression. State censorship must not be allowed to replace the IBA and BBC Board of Governors. They must be reconstituted on democratic lines and extended to cover all the new technologies.

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'THREE OUT OF FOUR': A REPORT ON THE MANCHESTER CONFERENCE

BY SUSAN BOYD-BOWMAN

A NATIONAL CONFERENCE TO MARK CHANNEL 4'S THIRD ANNIVERSARY was how it was billed, and it drew a shifting congregation of about 120 people to the Cornerhouse, Manchester's new media centre on November 30/December 1, 1985. One of the first conferences to be hosted by the sleek Cornerhouse, it was ostensibly an occasion for evaluation of the Fourth Channel, but it demonstrated yet again that capital development in the media sector has not been matched by greater sophistication in mounting critiques of broadcasting. The organisers – the Independent Film and Video Makers Association (IFVA) and the Television Users Group (TUG) – evidently wished to avoid the self-congratulatory tone of the industry's own talkfests (such as the Edinburgh Television Festival), and to set the agenda around issues of concern to the independent production sector. But they weren't able to attract a very impressive delegation from the Channel itself (though it made a £1000 contribution to the running cost of the conference). Moreover, they were unable to attract executives in the ITV companies or producers from the larger 'core' independent production companies which increasingly secure a larger share of the Channel's commissions. Perhaps the Channel 4 establishment suspected that the conference would prove to be a lobbying forum for those on the margins of television

production; and indeed the impact of the Channel on the 'working conditions and creative opportunities' of the independents – and particularly the workshop sector – became the focus of the conference before the first coffee break. So it was fitting if unfortunate that Alan Fountain, who looks after them, was the only Commissioning Editor to attend, and he found himself the reluctant addressee of many of the statements from both the platform and the floor. The eight panel sessions shifted uneasily from complaint about the Channel's lack of responsibility and accountability as an employer, to modest public relations exercises by those few representatives from Charlotte Street who had been prevailed upon to put in an appearance. To draw a parliamentary analogy, it was like backbenchers getting together for a collective (if not collaborative) grouse, and being bucked up by the whips.

Even more annoying than the ill-considered way in which these sessions had been conceived – the usual carve-up of topics like the role of educational broadcasting, equal opportunities issues, the policies of the broadcasting unions – was the failure of a fair proportion of advertised speakers and chairpersons to appear. Farrukh Dhondy wasn't there to discuss the representation of ethnic minorities, and John Ellis was unable to chair a panel on the relation between C4 and the cinema. These absences

didn't stop panels from being overloaded with speakers, prone to repetitious and ill-prepared presentations, lax chairing, and even more marginalisation of discussion from the floor than is usually the case at such conferences.

As posited by Dorothy Hobson, currently engaged on a history of the Channel, the theme of the conference might have been the degree to which C4 has lived up to its commitment to innovation in broadcasting, but the task of providing a keynote speech fell to board member and independent producer Roger Graef, who, while defending the Channel as a concept, berated its failure to fulfil its potential. Reading out the transmission schedule for a recent weekend, he could detect precious little that could be considered different from what other channels might provide. Later speakers had a more political interpretation of innovation as intervention in the mainstream discourses (of current affairs, in particular), and the precious *Eleventh Hour* slot was bracketed out from criticism as usual, but almost everyone lamented C4's drift to conventionalism. The convergence theory, that the three-year-old channel is tending to resemble the other channels in programme mix, transmission patterns, marketing, and even in its audience profile, was a theme voiced again and again, in tones ranging from relief (Jane Perry from the Davidson Pearce advertising agency who gave a vapid account of audience research) to misgiving (Christopher Hird from Diverse Productions) to outrage (Sarah Boston, who pointed out that C4 is no better than ITV when it comes to promoting the employment of women in production, and Isaac Julien from the black film and video workshop Sankofa, who maintained that all innovative programmes had disappeared from the schedules).

The Channel's own conception of innovation was expounded by Managing Director Justin Dukes, who was the only speaker to have a platform to himself. (The organisers were unable to distribute the whole of the Channel's glossy 1985 Report, which includes a fascinating thirteen page feature on innovation.) Of total transmission hours in 1985, 23 per cent had come from independent suppliers (down from 29 per cent the previous year, it should be noted), and these suppliers had 'proved themselves' in the quality of their productions and the professionalism of their approach. Innovation in

form was guaranteed by the 'inspiration of artists' who brought proposals to the Channel's attention (Alterimage, for example); but when it came to innovation in *content*, the Channel, said Dukes, had to be in the driving seat. It was steering in five directions:

1. catering for sectoral interests (like trade unions, business, lovers of American football);
2. extending the conventional categories (in purchased films, for example);
3. airing new voices (the workshop contributions to *People to People*);
4. opening up new slots (like *Opinion and Comment*);
5. widening the international scope (programmes from Brazil, Pakistan, Poland).

In pursuing these public service goals, the Channel was calling on audiences to change their views, and trying to 'make society better'. But Dukes concluded that these goals were more likely to be achieved if C4 had a 24 hour transmission schedule to dispose of, and also if the BBC assumed *its* proper responsibilities in providing a 'critical mass of opportunities for the independent sector', a task the Channel finds onerous on its own.

A critique of this exposition was not forthcoming, and virtually all comments from the floor were aimed at the Channel's internal structure, and its responsibilities to independent suppliers. There was a cluster of contradictions in this lobbying effort. Numerous speakers referred to what has now become the conventional wisdom that C4's paradigm of regulated diversity, in a system based on globally casualised labour, cost-effectiveness, and competition between autonomous commissioning editors, is a model being enjoined on other broadcasting institutions, and the BBC in particular. This model of broadcasting maintains that innovation can be secured only when there is a frequent turnover among producers, working on short-term contracts, for editors competing with each other and subject to financial discipline. As Michael Jackson of Beat Productions put it, C4 fosters the view that 'lean and hungry people make better programmes', which is patently not true, and he cited the case of RPM, which was obliged to shift from a risk-taking cooperative to a conventional company in order to stay alive. But those outside the system seemed to be calling for better institutionalisation

of that model, which would not confine competition to the favoured few whose faces are already known to those doling out development money.

On the other hand, those who have had a taste of the system, and the union delegates especially, lambasted the Channel for refusing its responsibilities as an employer, for not enforcing an equal opportunities policy among suppliers and so forth, in short for not being sufficiently regulatory. Shouldn't the Channel be doing more to promote the distribution of programmes after transmission, by paying for subtitling, or for the additional cost of copyright clearances for theatrical or foreign release? Now that the workshops are moving into drama, shouldn't they have larger budgets, but would this mean fewer franchises, shorter contracts, less editorial control? The security of employment that permits risk-taking in programme-making was more important than access for those jostling to get through the revolving doors of Charlotte Street.

But the radicals and some younger would-be producers trying to break into a retrenching industry, continued volleying pluralist suggestions for improving the market mechanism. Rumours have been rife that the Channel's patronage system verges occasionally on nepotism. Only certain companies have been invited to apply for some commissions, for example, and the ACTT representative predicted an eventual lawsuit over conflicts of interest in the commissioning process. Might not such inequity be removed by publicly advertising forthcoming commissions in a tender system? Wouldn't it be better if shorter tenures were imposed on Commissioning Editors and management, or if the Board of Governors were expanded to include blacks and more women, or if the personal power of Jeremy Isaacs were circumscribed? (As the Commissioning Editor for Youth Programmes commented in another context: 'The Channel still doesn't have any meaningful concept of success, other than Jeremy's guiding vision, which is probably good enough.'¹)

The Women's Film, Television and Video Network (WFTVN) presented a press release about its survey of the Channel's performance on equal opportunities for women:

*The Channel's open-door policy to proposals on merit (alone?) suggests an ambivalence about its commissioning process where very clear policies are needed. . . . We anticipate few changes on the 'women's' programming front until a more evenly distributed gender balance is made in the commissioning department.*²

WFTVN had three recommendations to make: that the commissioning editors keep records of production teams hired for C4 commissions, that the Channel appoint an Equality Officer, and that it 're-evaluate its commissioning process'. As various would-be suppliers asked politely, couldn't the criteria for successful programme applications be made a little more explicit?

Such proposals for democratisation – and the demands for further subsidy by those on the inside track – were countered by the Channel's representatives with arguments which sounded like the New Realism. Television is inherently not democratic, they said, and the present political climate demands especially strong leadership. Alan Fountain accused the would-be reformers of mouthing a 'discourse in a world that doesn't exist' – or at least is disappearing with the demise of the GLC. The role of the independents within the Channel can be protected only by thinking in terms of the market, not by expecting state aid to land in the laps of producers. As the same Editor for Youth Programmes remarked in the *Broadcast* interview:

*People enter this industry as a valuable meritocracy in which the best talent wins, the talent that serves the audience best. C4 was not set up to keep independent producers in telex machines or offices in W1.*³

And it does seem as if, after a formalist winter, the independent sector is discovering that audiences must be pleased, but this shift was expressed by Alan Fountain as converting to a 'product-led' strategy. Yet again continuity of

¹ John Cummins quoted in David Housham, 'Charlotte Street's Very Own Gang of Four', *Broadcast*, November 1, 1985.

² 'Channel 4 Television and Equal Opportunities', £2.50 from WFTVN, 79 Wardour Street, London W1V 3PH.

³ Quoted in David Housham, *op cit.*

employment was said to contradict the flexibility and innovation that the Channel was created to foster.

Examination of those products was something the conference singularly failed to provide. Apart from current affairs series like the defunct *Friday Alternative* and *20/20 Vision*, almost no series or individual programmes were mentioned. In his absence, Senior Editor for Fiction David Rose had sent a list of *Films on Four* and the as-yet-untransmitted *Shadey* was the only screening during the conference, which might have provided the occasion to discuss the sorry pass to which the première drama slot has sunk – but it didn't, though many people made the ritualistic call on the Channel to expand its support for film production. The interventionist quality of every *Eleventh Hour* (and *Visions*) programme was so much taken for granted that individual programmes didn't need to be examined.

From the floor, Ron Moule did question the claim of the workshop sector – in this case, Red Flannel in Wales – to be 'representing' their communities. And the day before, Jonathan Curling had noted that each workshop soon sets itself up as a production company – a wasteful duplication of resources. But no one took up such criticisms as broached by Sheila Whitaker in 'Declarations of Independence' (and quoted by Andrew Higson in his discussion of the role of the independents in British Film Year in *Screen*)⁴, to the effect that much of the early work shown on Channel Four wilfully disregarded not only narrative, but the audience's desire for some pleasurable alternative to it:

*Even with the best will in the world, TV audiences found it hard to come to terms with films originally designed for an audience of cognoscenti. Thus the problem with which independent exhibitors had struggled – how to build audiences for films which by their nature assume a fairly high level of knowledge of and concern with the issues of film aesthetics, not least those of realism and of social and cultural politics – was brutally and embarrassingly foregrounded.*⁵

Three years on, and we're still being embarrassed by such ill-thought-out programmes as the *Acting Tapes*, which – while they may work perfectly well as audio-visual aids for workshop

events on acting – as broadcast programmes explaining dramatic traditions repressed in Britain ended up perversely enhancing the political impact of the dominant literary tradition as explored in another workshop-based series transmitted on Channel Four: Michael Bogdanov's contentious *Shakespeare Lives* workshops. (But those were produced at London Weekend Television, got an early evening slot, and have been given a repeat.) The degree to which independent film-makers have themselves to blame for making the *Eleventh Hour* a ghetto for the avant-garde was not on the conference agenda.

The contradictions between the market and public service models of broadcasting, between pluralism and planning in cultural production, between ownership of means of production as opposed to those of distribution, are issues which have been aired in academic circles, within metropolitan government, at meetings of the Television Users Group, and doubtless within the open-plan offices of Charlotte Street. And questions of progressivism in popular forms, of the relations between fictional and documentary address, of post-modernism in the media, are topics discussed amongst media students across the country. But the '3 out of 4' conference stuck to the myopic preoccupation with the working conditions of a handful of freelancers, and neglected to examine the relation between the work of 'the independents' and whatever the Other Lot represent, or to explore the contradictions between innovation and continuity. That such a forum for debate was wasted is a pity, particularly since it gives Channel 4 an unnecessary let-out when it comes to repressive tolerance of less narrowly based criticism (and celebration) in the future. But those in power might have concluded, if they took any notice, that the official Opposition remains fundamentally Loyal.

⁴ Andrew Higson, 'The Discourses of British Film Year', *Screen*, January-February 1986, vol 27 no 1, pp 86-110.

⁵ Sheila Whitaker, 'Declarations of Independence', in Martyn Auty and Nick Roddick (eds), *British Cinema Now*, London, British Film Institute, 1985, p 89.

FILM ACTING AND INDEPENDENT CINEMA

BY ANDREW HIGSON

¹ In addition to those acknowledgements made in the text, I would like to thank all those involved in the Phoenix Arts and NFT events, and especially Val Baxter, Nick Burton, James Swinson and Mark Nash.

² See also John O Thompson, 'Beyond Commutation—a Re-Consideration of Screen Acting', *Screen*, Sept-Oct 1983, vol 26 no 5, p 75.

IN SEPTEMBER 1985, *Screen* published a special issue on acting and cinema, an issue which included my interview with Mark Nash and James Swinson, co-directors of Channel 4's *Acting Tapes*. The tapes and the special issue of *Screen* together seek ways of discussing the question of film acting within the theoretical frameworks developed over the last few years and in relationship to debates about independent cinema in Britain. More recently, the tapes were shown as part of a short season focusing on film acting on Channel 4's *Eleventh Hour* slot, and as part of a much longer season on the same topic at the National Film Theatre (NFT) in London. In addition, there have been various events organised around the tapes, including a *Screen* day school at the NFT, and a weekend of discussions, screenings and video/acting workshops at Phoenix Arts, Leicester. What follows is an attempt to develop in a relatively systematic way some of the ideas thrown up in these various contexts, and to relate them both to the writings of Meyerhold and Kuleshov, Bresson and Brecht, and to the context of British independent cinema in general.¹

At the NFT event, John Caughie argued that it is important to distinguish between two ways of thinking about acting², which we might loosely summarise as the difference between the *intentions* of specific traditions of acting, and the *effects* of acting in terms of the production of meaning. My interest here is in the relationship between the two, and particularly the implications of such an approach for the development of appropriate acting strategies for independent cinema.

On the one hand, different traditions of acting involve specific forms of training, the development of particular skills and forms of concentration, and specific assumptions about the relationship between interiority/exteriority, and/or between the individual subject/social relations.

This can perhaps be most easily characterised in terms of an example developed in the *Acting Tapes*. For Stanislavsky, we might have the following structure –

I saw a bear (stimulus)
I was frightened (emotion)
so I ran (response).

Here the actor's training must concentrate upon developing the skill and concentration necessary to *emote fear*. But in Meyerhold's biomechanical schema, we have the following structure –

I saw a bear (stimulus)
I ran (response)
because I was frightened (implication).

(In Bresson's exhortation, 'Let the cause follow the effect, not accompany it or precede it.')

³ Robert Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, New York, Urizen Books, 1977, p 51.

Meyerhold's actor must concentrate upon developing a visually expressive physical dynamism, which in terms of cinema acting still seems useful, despite the behaviourist undertones of the training.

⁴ See Lev Kuleshov, 'Art of the Cinema', in Ron Levaco (ed), *Kuleshov on Film: Writings of Lev Kuleshov*, University of California Press, 1974; Barry King, 'Articulating Stardom', *Screen*, Sept-Oct 1985, vol 26 no 5; John O Thompson, op cit; John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982, pp 91-108; Richard Dyer, *Stars*, London, BFI, 1979; and Stephen Heath, 'Film and System: Terms of Analysis, part II', *Screen*, Summer 1975, vol 16 no 2, pp 101-107.

The *Acting Tapes* deal specifically with the two acting traditions as distinguished here – the naturalist tradition of Stanislavsky, the Group Theatre, the Actors' Studio and the Method; and the anti-naturalist tradition of Meyerhold and Kuleshov, Brecht and Bresson. This means that the tapes are more concerned with institutions, forms of training and performance conventions, than with acting as a sign-system capable of producing specific meanings in specific contexts.

⁵ Bertolt Brecht, 'Against Georg Lukacs', published as 'Popularity and Realism', in Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison (eds), *Modern Art and Modernism*, New York, Harper and Row, 1982, pp 231 and 228.

The second way of thinking about film acting is, however, directly concerned with the semiotics of acting: the meaningfulness of acting signs produced in various systems of difference and identity, under the particular conditions of the institution of cinema.⁴ As soon as one starts considering acting in these terms, it becomes clear that acting signs are caught up in a polysemic production of meaning and pleasure, crucially dependent upon the moment of viewing. As such, the intentions of a particular acting strategy (in the context of the (inter)textuality of a film) do not have any necessary relationship to any particular predetermined effect. As John Caughie argued at the NFT event, it would be wrong to operate upon a rigid distinction between the ideological efficacy of naturalist and anti-naturalist acting, where naturalism automatically means empathetic identification = bad, and anti-naturalism automatically means distanciation = good. Formal devices (and in this respect acting functions as a set of formal devices) cannot be assumed to have a fixed ideological effect in all circumstances. Thus Brecht, in his essay 'Against George Lukacs', agrees with those who 'did not believe in such things as "the" method. They knew that many methods were necessary to attain their goal.' Later in the same essay, Brecht writes:

*We must not derive realism as such from particular existing works, but we shall use every means, old and new, tried and untried, derived from art and derived from other sources, to render reality to men – in a form they can understand.*⁵

As an example of the way in which an acting style may produce quite unintended effects, Caughie pointed to the way in which the Method school of naturalist film acting may in fact drift into self-reflexivity, signifying a power of presence and an inner truth which may actually *exceed* the requirements of narrative. Thus, the gestures of Marlon Brando in *The Godfather* tend to exceed narrative motivation – to exceed that which is narratively required of character. *Intended* as a display of descriptive, realistic detail (ethnicity, authority, etc), it may actually be read as a display of the actor as such. In such cases, the dialectic of control/egotistic self-expression tends to draw attention to the actor's mastery (of actorly skills, of self-control...), the ability to generate beguiling but superfluous gestures, and to string out narratively redundant actions – so that to watch Method acting is to be fascinated by the obsessive nature of the performance, rather than by the signified or the represented of the action. Further, this spectacle of mastery too easily articulates a masculinity which is hardly appropriate to all roles. The other side of this dialectic is the tendency to draw attention away from the exigencies of character or role and towards the actor's persona in terms of a mysterious inner truth. In other words, the attempt to 'portray reality' is blocked by the imprecision, irrelevancy and distraction of naturalism's trivial verisimilitude.⁶ On the other hand, it should be recognised that there will always be a certain ambiguity, coincidence and redundancy of meaning built into any acting strategy.

These considerations suggest that at the level of a semiotics of acting, the distinction between naturalism and anti-naturalism, or between 'the natural' and 'the stylised' is actually not very useful. More useful is the distinction made by Barry King at the NFT event⁷ between four levels or categories of acting performance, thus specifying the material site of production of acting signs:

the facial
the gestural
the corporeal (or postural) and
the vocal.

However the actor may think about these different categories, for the spectator they function as signs, which are themselves caught up in two distinct meaning systems.

First, we can note that the four categories are all, including the vocal, physical categories; consequently, the meaningfulness of each category, the extent to which they register, is, in part, dependent upon physical type (e.g., long face, large body, high-pitched voice...) calling up specific cultural connotations. John O Thompson has argued that such types are at one level *givens*, or *positivities*: their meaningfulness is relatively autonomous of any system of difference.⁸ But at another level these types are further pitched into the play of meaning through the system of physical differences scattered across a film. Thus the meaning of a physical type is constituted partly in terms of positive *identity*, and partly in terms of its *difference* from other types.

Secondly, there is a differential system of movement/stasis of the face,

⁶ See Michael Patterson's account of Peter Stein's work with actors, in M Patterson, *Peter Stein – Germany's Leading Theatre Director* (Directors in Perspective), Cambridge University Press, 1981.

⁷ See also Barry King, *op cit*, p 29.

⁸ John O Thompson, *op cit*, p 65.

the gesture, the body and the vocal chords. Again, there is an external (or extra-textual) and an internal (textual) level of meaning produced here. 'Externally', there is both a highly conventionalised cultural coding of movement (as in Delsarte's codification of melodramatic gestures, or the gestures of Peking opera) and a much more ambiguous though still readable cultural codification of 'everyday' gestures signifying different emotions or states of mind (e.g., raised eyebrows as a sign of surprise). 'Internally', further meaningful differentiations can be produced, between minimal and frenetic movement, between precise control and looseness or ambiguity of movement, between economy and superfluity.

The exact range of these various intersecting fields of meaning in any particular film will depend on several other factors: casting decisions; the skill of the actor; the persona of the actor; the nature of character and role; make-up and dress; *mise-en-scène*, camerawork and montage.

I now want to consider, in a relatively programmatic way, the practice of film acting in relation to independent cinema, under six headings:

- 1) the economy of the voice;
- 2) the economy of face/gesture/body – 'doing nothing';
- 3) precision of movement in relation to the camera's field of vision;
- 4) fragmenting character and externalising emotion – identity and identification;
- 5) stylisation and distantiation in the cinema;
- 6) continuity and systematisation of work with actors – the ensemble.

There is, however, a major problem in attempting to address independent cinema as if it were a unified sector, or a unified practice. In what follows, I have not attempted to deal with the current problems of funding facing independent film and video workers, or with the different sites of 'independent' film and video practice, and how these affect the aesthetics, politics and ideologies of oppositional and interventionist work. What follows is a polemical call for a more imaginative cinema of ideas, which embraces both fictional and documentary forms – and crucially a cinematic practice which thinks seriously about the acting strategies it mobilises.

The economy of the voice

Cinema is too often characterised as simply a *visual* medium, which is clearly inadequate. On the other hand, British theatre is too often characterised as simply an oratorical medium, which is not only in itself inadequate but has also produced a particular style of theatrical voice-training inappropriate for film-work in most cases. The stylisation and class-specificity of that training allows for only a very limited range of uses of the voice in British cinema, where it has been used primarily 'to enunciate and project text or dialogue'.¹⁰ As has often been noted, this has resulted in overly theatrical scripting of films, with the burden of 'intended meaning' (the 'message' of the film) loaded on to dialogue, at

⁹ For a discussion of the terms 'actor', 'character', 'actant', 'persona', and 'role', see Barry King, *op cit*, pp 38-41; and Stephen Heath, *op cit*, pp 101-107.

¹⁰ Mark Nash and James Swinson, 'Acting Tapes', *Framework*, no 29, 1985, p 82.

¹¹ See e.g. his article 'The Question of Criteria for Judging Acting', in John Willett (ed), *Brecht on Theatre*, London, Methuen, 1978, pp 53-56.

¹² See John Ellis, 'Victory of the Voice', *Screen*, vol 22 no 2, 1981.

the expense of a visually complex cinematic form. Obviously this is crudely put, but it does signal the need for a different approach to script-writing, *mise-en-scène* – and the vocal level of acting. Useful though they may be in certain circumstances, it is important not to fall back on conventional English theatrical speech patterns when different vocal work may be more meaningful. Brecht's practice of using the voice in a gestic manner¹¹ suggests that it is important to work on different speech patterns, speeds of delivery and rhythms, on different tones and accents, and on the varying possibilities of conversational speech, song, reading, oratory, etc. In part, this is a question of developing a precise and economic use of the voice in relation to the microphone rather than the acoustics of the theatre.

Various cinematic references offer examples in which the voice has a quite different signifying practice to that demanded of the English theatrical actor: the meaningfulness of Method acting's vocal strategy is as much dependent upon a *redundancy* of linguistic units as it is upon the clear articulation of a verbal message; Bresson consistently uses a distantiating flat vocal tone, a voice without conventional intonation or emphasis; certain British independent films have also adopted unconventional vocal strategies (e.g., *In the Forest*, *A History and the City*, *At the Fountainhead*). Developing a strategy which requires a 'complex listening' on the part of the spectator does not necessarily mean resisting theatrical conventions completely. *Darkest England*, for instance, in part depends upon the class connotations of different English theatrical voices: it is near-parodic in its use of these representational conventions.

Before leaving the category of the vocal, it is important to consider the voice in documentary, another key aesthetic and ideological practice within British cinema, including the independent sector. Thirties documentaries such as *Housing Problems* (1935) established the generic convention of the voice-over; but it was a convention with specific relations of power built into it. *Housing Problems* has a key voice, which introduces the film and each of the various other speakers of the film to the audience; in that sense it is the voice of authority – and of course it is also the voice of a white male upper-middle-class Southerner.

During World War II documentarists cast different voice-types for the voice-overs of their films, seeking more 'populist' voices (e.g., in Humphrey Jennings' wartime films or *Desert Victory*¹²). Authority was now blended with trustworthiness and familiarity, and these three categories have been crucial to the development of the documentary genre on television, where similar vocal strategies have been used for voices-over, with a similar relationship between the voice of authority (e.g., the newscaster) and other voices of the programme, mediating their more 'partial', since less authoritative, 'information' to the viewer at home. Recent documentary programmes produced in the independent sector have attempted to use the voice in different ways. Two recent *Eleventh Hour* films from Newcastle's Trade workshop, whose vocal strategies are reminiscent of Rotha's films of the mid-'40s, have been particularly interesting in this respect. Both *Farewell to the Welfare State*

and *Mothers Don't Forget* resist the use of any single voice of authority, having instead a montage of voices, some of which are identified as the voices of people interviewed in the course of the programmes, but others of which split the function of *Housing Problems*' single voice of authority, presenting 'impartial' information across a number of voices. More specifically, differently gendered voices are used, as well as voices specifying different regional, racial and class accents. In addition, *Farewell to the Welfare State* uses a very specific modulation of the voice—consistently deep (women as well as men) and consistently quiet (as opposed to strident). It is this sort of attention to the voice, both in relation to its cultural connotations and the formal relations of different voices, that the independent sector as a whole must develop.

The economy of face/gesture/body – 'doing nothing'

*The things one can express with the hand, with the head, with the shoulders! ... How many useless and encumbering words then disappear! What economy!*¹³

If British actor-training is voice-specific, it is also inadequate in its attention to facial, gestural and corporeal movement (and non-movement), particularly in relation to the requirements of cinema. From Kuleshov on, film directors and film actors have felt that the gestural

¹³ Robert Bresson, op cit, p 64.



Stylised performance: Kuleshov's *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr West...*, quoted in the *Acting Tapes*.

¹⁴ See Ron Levaco, 'Introduction', in Levaco, *op cit*, p II.

¹⁵ Lev Kuleshov, *op cit*, p 61.

¹⁶ *ibid*, p 63.

¹⁷ Barry King, *op cit*, p 33.

requirements of cinema are different to those of theatre, calling for a different training. In part, this reflects a belief that it is cinema's 'natural' propensity to be a photographically realistic medium, a belief in the 'essential' (ontological) realism of cinema, and a desire to have as naturalistic a performance as possible, stripped of all theatrical mannerisms and stylisations, which are believed to look wrong on the screen. Yet consider, on the other hand, the highly stylised performances of Kuleshov's actors in *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks*; the expressionistic acting used by Eisenstein in all his films, but particularly *Ivan the Terrible*; and the use of music-hall performers such as George Formby and Tommy Trinder in certain British popular films. Clearly, in certain circumstances, stylised and mannered performance is useful – and just as clearly there is not a perfect fit between Kuleshov's theory and practice.¹⁴ He writes 'stylization in the cinema simply does not work'¹⁵ – but it does not work because he makes a distinction between 'theatrical fake' and 'real material'. Where an ambiguity of reality and illusion is to be played upon in the film, stylisation may well work.

At the same time, even within a stylised acting practice, physical movement must still be economic, and regulatable. Kuleshov again:

*In order to give maximum expressiveness to the symbol, one must exploit the given plane of the screen with optimal economy – in other words, there must not be one piece of superfluous space on the screen, and if you show something which cannot occupy the whole surface, then all excess must be eliminated.*¹⁶

This applies as much to acting as to any other aspect of *mise-en-scène* (and indeed is developed by Brecht as a key facet of his 'epic' acting strategy for the theatre), and involves stripping away all that is not required within the scene or image. Whether in a stylised acting practice, or in a naturalist acting practice (although of course naturalism is just as much a style as any other acting practice), there are moments when one or more actors are required to '*do nothing*', thus calling for a minimalist style of acting (although still calling for work and concentration): shots involving characters waiting, or watching, or thinking, or day-dreaming, where the key to the success of the scene is the absence of movement or expression (which is expressive in itself, of course). It's interesting to note that it is precisely this minimalism that English theatrically trained actors find most difficult about acting for the camera. Indeed, as Barry King has pointed out, within the ideology of the acting profession, such requirements seem like an abuse of or failure to appreciate the talents of the actor – in King's term, it seems like a process of de-skilling.¹⁷

Bresson is perhaps the director who has most rigorously developed the skill of getting his 'models' (as he prefers to call his non-professionally trained actors) to do nothing:

It is not a matter of acting 'simple', or of acting 'inward', but of not acting at all.

For Bresson, this is bound up in a metaphysics of the subject (the actor/character as subject); a search for an inner truth:

*Unusual approach to bodies. On the watch for the most imperceptible, the most inward movements.*¹⁸

But once again, we may note a slippage between intention and effect. While we may agree with Bresson that 'it is the flattest and dullest parts that in the end have the most life'¹⁹, from a materialist point of view it is not a revelation of some 'inner truth' which is remarkable, but the extent to which this 'minimalist naturalism' becomes *strange*, in the Brechtian sense, drawing attention to the actor-character's performance of everyday events, perhaps de-familiarising the everyday. This is certainly one of the effects of the use of a similar acting style in the films of Straub-Huillet. Further, as Nick Burton suggested at the Phoenix Arts workshop, from the point of view of directing actors, it may be useful to think in terms of stripping an action of all extraneous details, but then continuing to re-work the action (rehearse it) until it becomes deliberately, but almost imperceptibly, strange. This is perhaps comparable to Eisenstein's approach which, at one point, he describes precisely in terms of 'the elimination of all that is accidental' but then adds that he wants to elevate those elements that remain 'to the highest level of expressiveness'²⁰. As in Kuleshov's films, the economy of the acting is produced in the relation between the removal of unwanted gestures, and the exaggeration and intensification of those that remain. Thus in *Ivan the Terrible*, Eisenstein 'makes the acting strange' by strongly stylising facial, gestural, corporeal and vocal movement. Whether Bresson or Eisenstein, the principal remains the same: a regulation, an economy of movement/non-movement (control/excess). For Bresson and Kuleshov, the achievement of economic acting is crucially dependent upon the actor/model's *automatic* and *mechanical* performance of actions. For Bresson, this task of 'recovering the automatism of real life' is a question of good directing: working with models in such a way that they do not think about what they are saying or doing: 'Radically suppress *intentions* in your models'.²¹ (Again, this is open to both a materialist and a metaphysical reading.) For Kuleshov, the automatic performance of acquired skills is a question of rigorous and systematic training, and he compares the good actor to the good driver:

*The whole secret to driving a car lies in its being driven automatically; that is, one does not consciously think about when it is necessary to change gears, as all of this is done mechanically and instinctively. . . . The qualified film actor, whose entire technique is calculated to give an efficient reading of his screen performance, is the result of precisely this same sort of training.*²²

¹⁸ Robert Bresson, op cit, pp 49 and 19 (my emphasis).

¹⁹ *ibid*, p 35.

²⁰ Sergei Eisenstein, 'Montage in 1938', *Notes of a Film Director*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1959, p 81.

²¹ Robert Bresson, op cit, pp 32, 8.

²² Lev Kuleshov, op cit, p 67.

²³ Bertolt Brecht, in Willett (ed), op cit, p 234.

²⁴ See Barry King, op cit. -

But it is worth bearing in mind a warning from Brecht:

*We get empty, superficial, formalist, mechanical acting if in our technical training we forget for a moment that it is the actor's duty to portray living people.*²³

Brecht, in his later writings, continually stresses the need to not simply make strange, to distance the spectator, and refuse empathy, but to create a tension between pleasure and instruction, between empathy and critical distance, between the strangely revealing and the natural . . .

The theatrical training of actors in Britain is particularly unsuited to the development of minimal, economic facial, gestural and corporeal aspects of acting. If the voice is dominant, there is another strong element in the discourse of British theatrical acting which sees good, professional acting in terms of work with props, 'business' – that is, quite the opposite of doing nothing. British theatrically trained actors thus tend to 'overact', to project voice and gesture within the theatre space. That professionalism comes to constitute 'actorliness'²⁴. For the cinema (or TV) it thus becomes necessary to develop ways of concentrating on underacting, on minimal vocal and gestural movement, and the ability to appreciate, professionally, silence, stillness and duration. Within the Stanislavskian tradition, a form of concentration has been developed around the use of objects: in training and in rehearsal/performance the actor works with objects (the *Acting Tapes* focus on the example of



The use of objects: Brando with Eva Marie Saint's glove in *On the Waterfront*.

Brando's work with Eva Marie Saint's glove, in a scene from *On the Waterfront*) in order to take his/her mind off the fact of acting, to forget the presence of the audience, to erect the fantasy of the fourth wall of the stage space. (An American critic, quoted in the *Acting Tapes*, writes of the Moscow Arts Theatre, 'The acting is so good we are convinced it is not acting.'²⁵)

Aside from the fact that we may want the actors to be self-critical of their performance *as a performance* rather than completely engrossed in their character, we might also note that this work with objects may bring in to the visual space (on to the screen) objects which are there for the benefit of the actor, and not the benefit of the spectator. This potential excess of 'added' actions and objects may well be a useful way of breaking the illusionary effect of naturalism (quite to the contrary of Stanislavsky's intentions) and drawing attention to performance, to actorliness; it may contribute to the redundancy of detail productive of a realistic effect²⁶; it may have a symbolic effect within the space of the fiction, where the object or gesture functions as an exterior sign of the interiority of the character (as in the case of Brando and the glove). But where this use of props either suspends the narrative in a pandae-monium of detail, or foregrounds the relationship of actor/subject and prop/object, this would be a very weak means of drawing attention to the relationship between the characters in a space (if what we are after, for instance, is the relationship between character A silently watching character B eating at another table in a restaurant). In other words, to do nothing effectively, and economically, may require a quite different form of concentration on the part of the actor. This suggests that it is more important to concentrate in this case on what you *are doing* (silently watching...) in the scene/shot, rather than using an object to escape the scene as a moment of acting, by concentrating on some superfluous action.

²⁵ Quoted in Constantin Stanislavski, *Stanislavski's Legacy*, (trans E R Hapgood), Theatre Arts, 1968.

²⁶ See Roland Barthes, 'The Realistic Effect', in *Film Reader* no 3, February, 1978.

Precision of movement in relation to the camera's field of vision

One might suggest that in acting for the cinema (or TV), the problem is not trying to forget that there is an audience present observing your every move, but in trying to establish who or what is to be addressed at the moment of delivery, in the absence of an audience. The key here is obviously to articulate the performance in relation to the camera, or, to be more precise, the camera's field of vision. Crucially, what determine the scope of the actor's facial, gestural and corporeal register are the details of framing, angle and distance of shot and focus within the overall framework of the montage. Again, Kuleshov provides the starting-point. Ron Levaco has described his concern for the

relationship of actor movement to cutting and composition. He strove to make his actors aware of duration as movement—a first principle of the cinema that is still valid, namely that screen action always has to conform to

²⁷ Ron Levaco, *op cit*, p 10.

²⁸ Ben Brewster, 'The Fundamental Reproach (Brecht)', in *Cine-Tracts*, Summer 1977, vol 1 no 2, p 48.

²⁹ *ibid.* Compare Lev Kuleshov, *op cit*, p 79.

*the imperatives of cutting, to the montage of a particular sequence as conceived by the director*²⁷

In order to achieve as precise movements as possible in the relationship between actors and camera, Kuleshov developed a series of exercises for his actors, enabling them to develop an ascetic codification of body and gesture, a semiotically complex choreography. But crucially that choreographic training is developed in relation to a three-dimensional conceptualisation of the camera's field of vision. Kuleshov refers to this as a spatial grid, or a spatial metric web. In effect it is a pyramid turned on its side, where the apex corresponds to the lens of the camera – although it would make more sense to use the analogy of a *cone*, rather than a pyramid. While Kuleshov's writings on how the spatial web is to be used make interesting reading, it is probably more useful as a conceptual device than as a model for actual exercises, a way of thinking the camera's field of vision three-dimensionally.

On the other hand, it should be recognised that the spatial grid metaphor takes for granted the place and function of the camera-eye, and Kuleshov's system depends upon and reproduces a centring of the subject perspectively. This corresponds to classical cinema, which is founded upon spectator identification with the look of the camera. As Ben Brewster has put it, in commenting on Brecht's distrust of the cinematic institution: 'acting is, as it were, directed at that ubiquitous place, there is no oblique view.'²⁸ If a sense of distantiating is to be achieved, it may be necessary to refuse that system which centres the subject, and to somehow prise open, rather than close down, the apparently natural conjunction of camera-identification and character-identification. As Brewster puts it,

*in the theatre there are always as many points of view as there are seats, and some of these points of view can be quite oblique, so the play is not directed at each spectator in the same way. . . . In the theatre my viewpoint remains my own from a particular place in the auditorium, looking at a performance as well as at a fiction. It is this identification with the camera that . . . makes it difficult to separate the objects being shown from the process by which they are being shown, that is, the particular performance.*²⁹

One possibility which might be developed as a means of wresting apart camera-identification (film performance) and character-identification (acting performance) is the strategy of *abusing* Kuleshov's metaphor of the spatial grid: refusing the desire to perform actions centrally for the eye of the camera (central to the camera/spectator's field of vision), deliberately producing oblique views of action, stressing the position and process of the look at the actor. (Certain dance films might serve as a model here, and perhaps some of the work of Maya Deren – though certainly, the films of Bresson, Straub-Huillet and Kuleshov at moments work in this way.) In effect, this is a question of exploiting off-screen space, at the margins of the camera's field of vision. (Of course, the same

sorts of effects might be achieved in the montage—that is, in the mapping together of different looks, different points of view at the same action.)

Fragmenting character and externalising emotion: identity and identification

For the actor, there is, additionally, the problem of how to prepare her/his part, given the extreme fragmentation of the film-making process (scenes shot out of sequence, etc), and the necessity to respond to events, views and people where they are not actually in the field of vision of the actor (reacting to the camera, in the place of the absent co-respondent is a shot-reverse shot structure, for instance). There are various strategies by which a sense of continuity and coherence might be achieved. Rehearsals and shooting schedules could, of course, be reorganised; alternatively, one might consider the script as the site of coherence, the framework which holds together the various fragments of the film-making process, and within which character is constructed. But in each case, there is a tension between the attempt on the part of the actor to hang on to character as a coherent sense of identity and the need in shooting to actually develop only a minimal aspect of character, a discrete fragment. Within a 'Brechtian' practice, such a tension could be worked on as immensely fruitful and productive, but within the naturalist tradition it is inevitably constructed as a problem: from Stanislavsky on, the centre of coherence and identity has been the acting subject, or rather the role into which the actor attempts to transform her/himself. But immediately this tradition is developed within the cinema, a further tension arises—because the centre of coherence and identity for cinema is not so much the acting subject, or the inner truth of the character, but the eye of the camera.

What is important for a radical film practice is to acknowledge these tensions between fragmentation and coherence, separation and identity, and between the camera-I and the acting-subject—rather than attempting to develop for the actor a psychologically rounded identity prior to constructing character and action for the camera. What is important, in the final analysis, is not the inner feelings of the actor, but how the image of actor-as-character and the performed gestures look on the screen; the important question to ask is 'does the visible action demonstrate the necessary points?' (A question which, incidentally, cannot be answered by recourse to the script alone as the site of coherence.)

Thus, rather than adopting as the starting-point an assumption of psychological unity and coherence, and acting as the embodiment of character, it may be more useful to start from a training which sees acting as the production of visual and aural signs—that is, which sees the body, its physical characteristics and its economy of movement, as a field of discourse. This suggests that the anti-naturalist training of actors—and especially the strategy of externalising emotions—may be more

³⁰ Bertolt Brecht, in Willett (ed), op cit, p 139.

³¹ *ibid*, pp 196 and 200.

³² Lev Kuleshov, op cit, p 99. See also Richard Combs' discussion of the Donald Sutherland character in *Revolution*, in 'Landscape after Battle, or Revolution's History Lessons', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1986, vol 53 no 626, p 69.

³³ Robert Bresson, op cit, p 24.

appropriate to *all* forms of cinema acting: the conditions of cinema demand that emotion be read *visually* from facial, gestural and corporeal signs, and *aurally* from vocal signs both diegetic (lip-synch, etc) and extra-diegetic (voice-over as a means of signifying character interiority, etc). Brecht, for instance, writes:

*Everything to do with the emotions has to be externalised; ie it must be developed into a gesture. The actor has to find a sensibly perceptible outward expression for his character's emotions, preferably some action that gives away what is going on inside him.*³⁰

Acting, in this framework, becomes not the enactment of a coherent, psychologically complex character, but a montage of gestures (or 'gests'), each one refined for the requirements of the shot (the eye of the camera), rather than the supposed inner consistency of the character. This is precisely the implication of Kuleshov's montage experiments, but also of Bresson's reference to actors as models for the montage, and Hitchcock's statement (reputedly) that 'actors are like cattle'. Brecht, again:

The coherence of the character is in fact shown by the way in which its individual qualities contradict each other....

*Splitting such material into one gest after another, the actor masters his character by first mastering the 'story'. It is only after walking round the entire episode that he can, as it were by a single leap, seize and fix his character, complete with all its individual features....*³¹

Brecht's gestic technique is comparable to Kuleshov's semiotic range of facial expressions, gestures and choreographies of the body. What Kuleshov can add, because he is talking about the cinema, is that 'people performing organised efficient work appear best on the screen.'³²

Stylisation and distantiation in the cinema

*The actor: 'It's not me you are seeing and hearing, it's **the other man**'. But being unable to be wholly **the other**, he is not that other.*³³

Brecht's strategy of distantiation is a means of establishing a critical distance between the performance of an action and the reading of that action, the process of making sense of it. It is a means of foregrounding the ideas, or the ideological processes at stake in the action, rather than encouraging the audience to become inextricably bound up in the psychological predicament or emotional state of the character performing the action. It is a means of linking the individual to the social as well as, or rather than, to the 'inner self', and the discrete action to its historical context. This distance is achieved in part through the stylisation of speech, movement, posture. The intention is to perform

actions in such a way that the actions themselves, and the issues at stake, are open to question, open to criticism. Thus, compare Brecht commenting on Stanislavsky's theatre:

What he cared about was naturalness, and as a result, everything in his theatre seems far too natural for anyone to pause and go into it thoroughly. You don't normally examine your own home, or your own feeding habits, do you?

*There is a complete fusion of the actor with his role which leads to his making the character seem so natural, so impossible to conceive in any other way that the audience has simply to accept it as it stands.*³⁴

The actor must demonstrate an action as if it were an ideological statement, in such a way that the audience feels obliged to form an opinion, to take sides in relation to the action. For Brecht, good acting is that which makes familiar characters and actions strange and astonishing again: not the reassurance of conventional documentary's recognition effect, but the *shock* of recognition. As Brecht puts it, 'everyday things are thereby raised above the level of the obvious and the automatic.' Or Bresson: 'an old thing becomes new if you detach it from what usually surrounds it.'³⁵ In general, Brecht suggests, there are two conditions necessary for the achievement of these sorts of effects. The first requires that the actor should resist complete identification with the role and attempt to develop a form of demonstrative acting. Secondly, as Ben Brewster has argued, it is crucial for Brecht that in theatre there is a *co-presence* of audience and actors, in order that

*a distinction be maintained throughout the performance between the actors and the parts that they are fictionally playing. . . . One can identify with the actor, which implies a separation from the role, and then identify with the role and that implies a separation from the actor.*³⁶

Brecht's epic theatre exploits these conditions, producing a constant oscillation between identification and non-identification, an oscillation which is central to his view of acting:

*The contradiction between acting (demonstration) and experience (empathy) often leads the uninstructed to suppose that only one or the other can be manifest in the work of the actor. . . . In reality, it is a matter of two mutually hostile processes which fuse in the actor's work; his performance is not just composed of a bit of one and a bit of the other. His particular effectiveness comes from the tussle and tension of the two opposites, and also from their depth. . . .*³⁷

In cinema, however, no such co-presence of actor and audience is achieved. On the contrary, much of the fascination of narrative cinema is derived from the *present-absence* to the spectator of the actor/personal/character.³⁸ Hence distantiation cannot be achieved by the same means

³⁴ Bertolt Brecht, in Willett (ed), op cit, pp 237 and 235.

³⁵ *ibid*, p 92; and Robert Bresson, op cit, p 26.

³⁶ Ben Brewster, op cit, pp 46-47.

³⁷ Bertolt Brecht, in Willett (ed), op cit, pp 277-278.

³⁸ See John Ellis, op cit.

³⁹ Ben Brewster, *op cit*, p 49.

⁴⁰ Richard Combs, *op cit*, p 69.

⁴¹ Barry King, *op cit*, p 29.

in theatre and in cinema. Classical cinema, as Brewster notes, has produced a style of acting, or more specifically an institution of star-making, which uses the cultivation of persona as a means of achieving an almost seamless coincidence of actor/persona and character (or narrative role), that is, between star-image and narrative image. But it is only an apparent seamlessness: there is a tension at the heart of the process, since 'naturalistic presentation is consistently broken within the commercial system in the interests of the star-system.'³⁹ Ostensibly, Hollywood depends upon a form of screen acting 'where the performer is just supposed to "be", his or her technique invisible'⁴⁰, but the institution of the star-system means that Hollywood constantly runs the risk of foregrounding the actor's persona, potentially against the grain of the narrative. There is always a certain disarticulation at stake, the identity of character is never entirely present or coherent.

It is at the site of this tension that it seems useful to think through the possibilities of distantiation *in the cinema*, despite—or rather, *because of*—the state of presence *and* absence. Within the cinema, the actor is present only as *image*; this image can be stylised to such an extent that it falls out of the flow of the narrative, halting that flow and resisting the struggle to contain it *as* character, *in* role: momentarily, it functions precisely as an image. A radical cinema performance might usefully exploit the split in identification between the image (the actor as persona), and the narrativisation of the role. In addition, it is still possible in cinema to separate out narrative role (the signified) from the performance of narrative actions (the signifier). King, for instance, defines naturalism as in part a system in which particular movements by the actor of face, gesture and body are to be read as natural to the narrative character, as his or her own movements (and not, therefore, the movements of an actor).⁴¹ Therefore a distantiating acting strategy might also attempt to execute such movements in such a way that they do *not* seem to be the natural movements of the character, producing a 'strange' lack of fit. I now want to detail various means by which these separations, these distances, these split identifications might be achieved.

First, there is the possibility of playing on the casting of actors according to or against 'type'. I would suggest that casting decisions involve a combination of relating the professional skills of the actor to the style of performance required, and relating the actor as a 'type' to the conception of narrative role. Casting on the basis of 'type' is itself at least a twofold concept. First, there is the question of the physical look of the actor, in terms of facial and corporeal characteristics as more or less culturally coded signs (and to this we may add the vocal sound of the actor). Secondly, although clearly the first feeds into the second, there is the question of *persona*, which brings into play such ambiguous concepts as charisma, personality, presence, aura, etc. In these senses, recognition of type involves a signification of the actor as always already an ideological construction: 'look' and 'persona' function as signs of both interiority and social status, establishing the actor as a relatively complex

social and psychological type, a complexity which is brought into play in the narrative development of the film. The extent to which this has any impact on the way in which the film and the performance are read will depend on the extent to which the audience 'knows' the actor from other roles, or other extra-filmic discourses, the range of facial, gestural, corporeal and vocal movements brought into play, the details of make-up and costume, and narrative determinations of character.

It is worth noting that different types of film draw on these implications of type-casting in different ways – but also that, as John O Thompson has argued, there is a certain typicality in all acting: 'individuality', the fully rounded character, always involves a sense of typicality, or what Thompson calls category-meaning.⁴² The conventional British documentary tends to foreground type in terms of physical look (and vocal sound) while the naturalist narrative film tends to foreground type in terms of persona. Both extremes involve a sense of the actor as 'document', but the former is assumed to be a more 'objective' form of document, while the latter implies a more 'subjective' documentation of the 'inner self'. It is also worth noting that *all* actors 'possess' a persona, and not just Hollywood stars.

One means of using 'type' to create the desired distance, the desired oscillation between identification and separation, is, as Simon Watney pointed out at the NFT event, to exploit the effects of *miscasting* (or casting against type). Watney's starting point was a quotation from Andrew Britton:

*The very concept of 'mis-casting' may well serve to naturalise the explicit appearance of ideological contradiction rather than its successful elision, just as the sense that an actor is 'ideally cast' may indicate that the critic is underwriting the projects of the film.*⁴³

On the other hand, as Watney pointed out, the sense of an actor being 'mis-cast' does point to an ideological tension in the film, between the meanings brought into play by the actor as 'type', and the meanings brought into play in the narrativisation of role and character. Clearly it would be possible to exploit this tension as ideologically productive. (It is worth comparing this to a comment in parenthesis by Brecht: 'It often helped the educational effect to have bad actors instead of good ones.'⁴⁴)

Another means of using 'type' is the possibility of developing the line of 'stereotyping', or what Eisenstein called 'typage'. That is, casting according to 'type', but on the basis of a sort of intensification of the category of the type in question. In part this is the strategy discussed earlier of using exterior signs as signs of both interiority and social status, a strategy which draws on a usually implicit and fairly crude semiotics of the body ('as if all cooks were fat, all peasants phlegmatic, all statesmen stately'⁴⁵, or as in the case of Eisenstein's films of the '20s, as if all capitalists were grotesquely bloated). The usefulness of this strategy (and it contributes to a radical reading of, for instance, *Coronation Street*) is the extent to which it reveals character to be *constructed*, as opposed to

⁴² See John O Thompson, *op cit*, p 67.

⁴³ Quoted in Simon Watney, 'Katharine Hepburn and the Cinema of Chastisement', *Screen*, Sept-Oct 1985, vol 26 no 5, p 53; see also Watney's discussion of these issues, *ibid*, pp 53-56.

⁴⁴ Bertolt Brecht, in Willett (ed), *op cit*, p 132.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, p 242.

natural: character can thus be recognised as an ideological category, separate from (but tied into) the body of the actor or the details of the narrative and role. The type thus functions as a gestic summation of ideological traits; the strategy insists that character be read precisely as *image*, and not as 'real' (indeed it seems *unreal* and yet still functions adequately as actant within the narrative). Caught up in the paradox of present absence, the actor/persona/character has been pushed more and more into the realm of the image, it has become more ideal, less tangible—and yet at the same time it is so heavily coded that it has become almost leaden, almost concretely tangible ('the characters are no more than cardboard cut-outs...'). What seems useful here is the tension between real person and image, between the tangible and the intangible. The possibilities of such an approach can be seen in Eisenstein's films of the '20s, of course, but also in the casting and acting of contemporary British independent film-maker Richard Woolley's *Telling Tales* and *Brothers and Sisters*. Think also of the effects of casting Bernard Miles and Brenda de Banzie opposite James Stewart and Doris Day in Hitchcock's 1956 version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*.



The semiotics of the body: Eisenstein's *October*, quoted in the *Acting Tapes*.

A second way of playing on the disjunction of identification with the actor/persona, identification with narrative role, and identification of the performance of the actions, is in terms of developing that eminently post-modern strategy of parody. Mark Nash pointed to the usefulness of

parody at the NFT event, but perhaps the most pertinent description of the potentialities of parody in general is provided by Peter Wollen:

*First, parody has an emancipatory aspect. It is always doubly coded. It is read alongside, through and apart from its 'target'. It depends on a complicated interplay of identity and difference, accepting the authority and priority of the 'target' text, converging with it, yet at the same time, separating itself from it, diverting, detracting, rebelling and subverting. Imitation, influence and allusion blend in, but parody constantly veers towards the hybrid, towards the **graft**, both compatible and incompatible with its apparent model. The model itself is subject to a kind of **dehiscence**, a peeling apart (to steal another favourite term from Derrida) which leaves it entire yet divided, releasing it for a new form of understanding, of re-inscription.⁴⁶*

⁴⁶ Peter Wollen, *Komar and Melamid*, exhibition catalogue, Edinburgh, Fruitmarket Gallery, 1985, p. 39.

⁴⁷ Barry King, *op cit*, p. 30.

It is this process of double coding that is important for our purposes: identity *and* difference, convergence *and* separation, compatibility *and* incompatibility, entire *yet* divided. Each set of terms seems to make sense in relation to Brecht's theory of distantiation, and the possibility of developing it as a practice for the different conditions of the cinema – and, of course, Brecht is famous for his radical plagiarism, in itself a form of parody. Note also the way in which the new inscription of the 'original' provides a new form of understanding of it, a changed meaning: a new political space is opened up (in film acting terms, between image, role and performance of actions). The impact of parodic acting can be seen in a stunning moment in *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, when Bev Francis parodies the posing routines of other body-builders.

What lay behind Nash's interest in parody was an argument that if British independent cinema is to progress, then it must draw on the most useful aspects of film, TV and stage acting as already developed in Britain. In fact, one might suggest that all well-executed British theatrical acting as it has been taken up in TV and film works as parody, particularly of assumptions about class. King suggests that repertory acting in general involves a form of behavioural imitation⁴⁷, and we might suggest that, by a process of inadvertent parody, the British theatrical tradition as taken up in film and TV work underlines or acknowledges that sense of *imitation* (specifying, in gestic manner, the specificities of the British class system at the level of representation). Nash's own example was to see the acting in Ealing comedy as a form of parody. Consider, for instance, that of Alec Guinness in *The Lavender Hill Mob*. Guinness' character is a petty-minded, ineffectual, asexual bank clerk. That is, a stereotype of the bank clerk mentality. Guinness' performance of the actions of the role, however, both ties in with this stereotype, converges with it, identifies (with) it, but at the same time *exceeds* what is necessary to represent it. Each sign of the bank clerk is exaggerated, but in an almost imperceptible way (hence, perhaps, its success as a comic performance). Each facial expression (the *subtly* knowing smile in the opening sequence in a South American bar) each

gesture (twee and hesitant but highly controlled hand movements) and posture (tight, diminishing, highly repressed, but methodical) becomes a sign in itself, escaping the narrative body, foregrounding the performance, but also the stereotype, as such.

A third strategy for achieving distanciation in the cinema is that adopted by Straub-Huillet in their films. Moving away from the exigencies of typage, and the various ways of (ab)using or parodying it, but still clearly dependent on questions of casting and direction, their films seem to *refuse* the presence of either actor or character, thus unbalancing the sense of present-absence: performance is consistently de-stylised, producing a radical non-presence of the actor. This process can be seen, for instance, in the de-dramatised, non-charismatic (i.e., non-theatrical) acting in their film *Class Relations*. Here the actors refuse the conventions of emphatic gesture and voice; they operate mechanically, such that identification with character in an empathetic sense is almost impossible, and we can relate to them only as figures formed in the ideological conditions of the society which the film establishes.

A fourth strategy is found regularly in at least those films of the melodrama genre described as 'Brechtian' (e.g., the films of Losey, Sirk and Minnelli in the 1950s). The performances of certain male actors stand out as exemplary in these films – notably Stanley Baker (in Losey's *The Criminal*, though also in his work for other directors – in *Helldrivers* and *Violent Playground*), Kirk Douglas (in *Two Weeks in Another Town*) and Robert Stack (in *Written on the Wind*). The productivity of such acting depends not only on the stylisation of movement, but also on the economy of the performance: the tension created between periods of minimal, apparently expression-less and emotion-less acting (the static, as it were), and sudden explosive bursts of facial, gestural and postural movement. Highly controlled acting here functions as the signs of repression, the body not just restrained, but visibly *strained* (the same would be true of the voice); the outbursts function as the return of the repressed, the out of control. For the spectator, this style of acting may have the effect of producing a double, and contradictory, presence of the performance, a performance which may become self-reflexive. The strategy is comparable to Barthes' comments on 'the grain of the voice' – for our purposes, the voice which, over and above any articulation of linguistic utterances, signifies its own materiality, its own performance (the voice, for instance, of Alpha 60 in Godard's *Alphaville*).

In one way or another, each of these strategies involves a form of vocal or choreographic stylisation (or de-stylisation, which amounts to the same thing), playing on the paradox of present-absence as a means of achieving a distancing effect. This seems close to Brecht's theory of the *gest* (*gestus*), the attempt to 'get to the gist of things' by pin-pointing with a gesture, in a physical dynamism of ideas. Although it would be wrong to collapse the idea of a *gest* solely into a gesture (in the sense of a physical movement of an actor, as I am using the term here), clearly some

gestures will work gestically. In order for the physical gesture of an actor to work gestically, it must both make sense within the narrative text, as the 'natural' action of a character, and point *outside* the text, to make some point about the social context and meaning of the action. It must work as a moment of summation, not just of narrative development, but also of the ideological conditions pertaining at that moment. Thus the suicide of a young unemployed man in *Kuhle Wampe* is not just the death of the 'heroine's' brother, not just another episode in the unfolding of the plot—but, at the same time, a comment on the conditions of unemployment in Germany in 1931. It is a gesture which exceeds narrative meaning.

In his discussion of Brecht's epic theatre, Walter Benjamin suggests that one of its most significant achievements is 'making gestures quotable'.

*Quoting a text implies interrupting its context. It will readily be understood, therefore, that epic theatre, which depends on interruption, is quotable in a very specific sense. That its texts are quotable would be nothing very special. But the gestures used in the process of acting are another matter.*⁴⁸

All acting is made up of gestures, but while Brecht talks about breaking acting down into its component parts, naturalism attempts to hold gestures in place, to mould them into a coherent whole—the unity of character. Brecht's theatre thus draws attention to the way in which a character/actor may use a gesture *here*, but may lift it out of that context, and use it also *there*. To quote a gesture in this way will tend to make the gesture as such stand out—acting is revealed as a montage of gestures; but, further, the process by which meanings congeal to the gesture will be 'revealed'. Quoted outside its initial context, the gesture takes on a different meaning; out of context, the gesture may be recognised as precisely a gesture, and no longer the natural action of a real living character. To quote a gesture in this way establishes it as sign, and constitutes an interruption at the level of language; it also, of course, impresses upon us the connotations of the gesture.

But gestures are constantly quoted by spectators of 'naturalist' films also. Certain gestures stand out in classic Hollywood films: the form cannot contain them, the narrative cannot exhaust their meaning. They become eminently quotable *as gestures*. For instance, part of the pleasure of the Western is the extent to which each successive film quotes the familiar gestures and posture of the cowboy drawing his gun to shoot down the hero/villain. But the gesture is also quoted outside the cinema by many spectators (not just in children's games, and perhaps even by those who have never even seen a Western!). Does such quoting reconstruct the gesture as *gestic*? Perhaps, insofar as we thereby wrest it from its narrative place, it becomes recognisable as a *sign*, and not just a narrative action: it thus draws attention to the construction of meaning, and the conventionality of the representation. Perhaps it is also gestic insofar as the quoting of the gesture is rarely to specify a precise moment

of narrative action in the film in which the gesture was last seen (though it must in part involve that meaning), but tends to establish a particular image or construct of heroic masculinity—in other words, to stand as a summation of a particular aspect of patriarchal ideology.

A style of acting which deliberately draws attention to the *skilful* execution of actions will consistently tend to produce gestures which exceed the narrative demands of a performance. As John Caughie pointed out at the NFT event, this was exactly the aim of Brecht's theatre practice. Brecht called upon his actors to deliberately break the power of the naturalist illusion by perfecting the performance of a gesture in itself, so that the audience could come to appreciate, in a critical way, the skill of the actor *as an actor*. Thus, in addition to becoming involved in the story and the predicaments of the characters, and in the ins and outs of the ideological problematic of the play, the audience also become connoisseurs of acting skills, in a mood of 'relaxed' appreciation. In this respect, it is interesting to read Lee Strasberg's reaction to the acting skills of the Berliner Ensemble: he is *astonished* by the realism of their performance, and full of admiration for the skill with which the actors perform the most basic tasks, the way in which they just do things (to perfection): he experiences no sense of 'actorliness', and at the same time he is fascinated by particular gestures, or, strictly, *gests* (the peeling of potatoes, the plucking of a real chicken) which are extended beyond their particular plot significance so that they come to have a 'higher' meaning which *encapsulates* the ideological moment of the action.⁴⁹

As a comparison, Caughie also discussed the acting of Buster Keaton⁵⁰, in whose films, he argued, gestures are presented in such a way that the audience again appreciates them as marvellous acting skills, over and above any narrative function they may have. And in citing the use of gestures in Method acting, Caughie noted that, while the intention may be different (attempting to achieve a completely naturalist performance), the effect may be the same: drawing attention to the skills of the actor, a certain actorliness, a bravura performance. In other words, naturalism may itself have an anti-naturalist effect!

The gesture which exceeds could clearly be accommodated in the framework of most of the 'distancing' strategies outlined above, and certainly the potential contradiction between the desire for a naturalist effect and the desire for skilfully executed actions can be exploited as a useful means of making strange. There is also clearly a potential contradiction between the call above for *both* the gesture which exceeds *and* an economy of movement in front of the camera: this is intentional. The means of finding a space for these contradictions within the film text is to construct the text as montage rather than as organic unity, allowing for a heterogeneity of possibilities, of effects. Perhaps the most productive work is that which produces a tension between 'the natural' and 'the strange', an acting strategy which is capable of constantly drawing the spectator into the story but repeatedly pushing the spectator away to a position of critical appreciation.

⁴⁹ See Robert H Hethmon (ed), *Strasberg at the Actor's Studio* (tape-recorded sessions), London, Jonathan Cape, 1966, pp 383-395.

⁵⁰ See also Bertolt Brecht, in Willett (ed), *op cit*, p 56: 'The actor Chaplin, incidentally, would in many ways come closer to the epic than to the dramatic theatre's requirements.'

Thus, where 'classical naturalism' demands a coherent text, seamless, without contradictions, resolvable within its own terms, the strategy of montage can precisely play on the productive contradictoriness of the text. Montage can also be a means of drawing attention to the complexity, the contradictoriness, the ideological constructedness of character, made up of fragments, of separate gestures. In such a text it may be appropriate to draw on and develop a variety of 'incompatible' acting styles and approaches to casting and characterisation. *At the Fountainhead*, for instance, uses three different actors to play the same character: an English actor, an actor from the Berliner Ensemble (i.e., Brechtian trained), and the 'non-actor' on whom the character was based. More recently, and perhaps more surprisingly, there is the case of *Revolution*, which Pam Cook and Richard Combs have described as a form of epic cinema. Two strategies in relation to acting are important here: firstly, the use of two quite distinct acting styles (British theatrical acting/Method naturalism) to set up the opposition between oppressors and rebels (and between the past and the present); and secondly, a refusal to organise the plot around the development of character. Character is not established as psychologically rounded and developing with the narrative; rather, it is established only in terms of what is necessary for each specific event. Event thus displaces personality as the focus of attention.⁵¹

⁵¹ See Pam Cook, review of *Revolution*, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1986, vol 53 no 626, pp 67-68, and Richard Combs, *op cit*, pp 68-70.

Continuity and systematisation of work with actors – the ensemble

Stanislavsky, Kuleshov, the Group Theatre, Brecht's Berliner Ensemble, Fassbinder and Oshima (and *Coronation Street*?) all developed their work in the context of ensembles. British independent cinema, on the other hand, has in the main been marked by an extreme instability and discontinuity of work, making it difficult to build up a close working relationship with actors, or to develop appropriate, systematic and rigorous forms of training. Even if directors wanted to follow a Bressonian line – preferring *not* to work with the same actor-models more than once, in order to achieve the required effects of automaticity and non-actorliness (non-theatricality) – continuity of work would be important in order to gain experience of *directing* actors. A Kuleshovian style of acting would clearly be almost impossible to achieve without a period of intense physical training and long rehearsal periods. But it is not just a matter of physical training that is important: there is also the world-view of the actor, and her/his attitude towards each project. In part, ensemble work is a means by which actors can retain some control over their work – without becoming Bresson's unthinking models, or Hitchcock's cattle. Further, Brecht noted that his epic style of acting 'demands a considerable knowledge of humanity and worldly wisdom and a keen eye for what is socially important'. And Benjamin notes that this orientation towards knowledge 'in turn determines not only the content, but also the

⁵² Bertolt Brecht, in Willett (ed), op cit, p 95; and Walter Benjamin, op cit, p 11.

tempi, pauses and stresses of (the actor's) whole performance.⁵² How then to establish the conditions for ensemble work? Perhaps by arguing for adequate funding of longer rehearsal periods; perhaps, as Adam Ganz suggested at the NFT event, by employing actors, as well as film-makers and administrators as members of film and video workshops . . .



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SCREEN ACTING: REFLECTIONS ON THE DAY

BY BARRY KING

The February 22 day school at the National Film Theatre on Acting and the Cinema – itself the culmination of a season of films on performance and film performances – provided a welcome opportunity for a concerted focus on, as the introductory literature put it, ‘one of the most popularly influential, and theoretically ignored, pleasures of the cinema’. To this extent, whatever the strengths and weaknesses of the Channel 4 *Acting Tapes* which functioned as the centre-piece for the NFT’s Acting season, they have encouraged the recognition that the area of performance remains one of the most described but least analysed of cinematic practices.

The special promise of the event lay in the chance it held out of bringing together practitioner accounts – directors, actors, commissioning editors and the like – and what might be called consumer-centred accounts – the views of film theorists, teachers and members of the general cinema-going public – acknowledging that all of these positionalities are rarely as discontinuous or as fixed as the extant division of theoretical and practical labour would suggest. It has to be said that this promise fell short of realisation; it is no doubt overly optimistic to have expected that it could. But the day school achieved, in my view, a very clear dramatisation of the difficulties presented to practices that seek to challenge the patterns of taste and appreciation that have been cultivated by the mainstream cinema, especially as these relate to a naturalistic or phenomenological reading of performance. That this should be the case is hardly unique or surprising, but to have thrown

these matters into relief was one of the accomplishments of the day.

To make this accomplishment clear and to set its limits, I want to recount some of the basic contours of a naturalistic approach to performance – meaning by this term an account that reads the filmic text as primarily a product of intentional reciprocal action between those who ‘create’ and those who ‘consume’.¹ The reason for this limitation is two-fold. First, this seems to me to be the level at which popular consumption is articulated as a discourse. Secondly, it is possible to point to discursive practices which are constructed and reconstructed by the concept of a conscious subject.² This is not to deny the usefulness of psychoanalytic accounts of the same range of phenomena. On the contrary, such latter accounts take as their object, and thus rely on the delineation of, naturalistic accounts.³ Finally, it is necessary to point out from the start that I assume without further explanation that there is an interpellatory link between naturalism as a *theatrical style* and a naturalistic reading of film texts, especially as both these formations rest on a personalised notion of causality.

¹ See, for example, the exchange between Ed Buscombe/Stephen Heath in *Screen*, Autumn 1973, vol 14 no 3, p 75ff.

² See Paul Hirst and Penny Woolley, *Social Relations and Human Attributes*, London, Social Science Paperbacks, 1982, p 131.

³ Though it would be disingenuous of me not to admit a closer affinity with a Sartrean, rather than Lacanian, theory of the unconscious. See D Archard, *Consciousness and the Unconscious*, London, Hutchinson, 1984.

One of the ultimate objectives of the day was to interrogate the relationship between performance styles and the independent cinema, the latter being defined broadly as 'those practices in the field of cinema which seek to challenge in various ways, interventionist, alternative and oppositional, the politics, aesthetics and economics of the dominant forms of cinema'⁴. (Though the focus on performance meant that non-figurant forms of cinema were specifically excluded from purview.) In the ensuing discussions, especially at the level of evidential detail, however, it was the practices of the mainstream cinema that occupied the position of key referent. This drift was not without its usefulness, a theory of performance must necessarily deal with the performances that have been given and must, in any case, be diacritical and comparative. Yet such a drift was at the same time a pertinent reminder, if one were needed, of the colonisation of the experience of film by Hollywood and its satellites.

The day school wasn't the first time nor, alas, the last, that analytic good intentions have been wrongfooted by an underexplored excess of pleasure that eludes and disarticulates criticism. Christian Metz has advised approaching the cinema in a manner – unfortunately left undefined by its proponent – that combines the critic and the fan. Likewise, Richard Dyer's *Stars* ends with a lament for the 'pleasures' that escape analysis. So in a minor way, my own presentation at the event, which was concerned to identify Joan Crawford's counter-narrational performance strategy in *Mildred Pierce*, encountered a similar problem of translation: the termination of a screened excerpt was met by an unmistakable sigh of disappointment.

In general terms, of course, it is not difficult to point to what was going on – the pleasures of narrative. But if such pleasures are fairly well understood, what awaits a better understanding are the discursive practices that consciously ratify them and play their part in the formation of a 'career' of consumption. While psychoanalytic accounts, especially those concerned with identification, gender and the pleasures of the 'look', have made ground in identifying the psychic determinants of consumption, the motives offered, the definitions of the pleasures derived, remain underexplored.

Yet it is such motives that are routinely given and routinely guide – even for those who might otherwise be expected to know better than to enjoy an 'ideologically unsound' movie – the way individuals distribute their financial support for the cinema.

While any detailed consideration of the ethnography of taste among different sectors of the general audience cannot be, for want of time and, more important, evidence, pursued here, a few preliminaries can be identified.⁵ The first of these concerns notions of the 'ease of consumption'. By this admittedly awkward term, I want to identify the view that the narrative form as developed by Hollywood, what has been called the classical narrative, corresponds or complements a naturalistic mode of perception. Thus, for example, it has been argued that the independent cinema in Britain has failed because it has wilfully turned its back on narrativity – a fault compounded by the fact, apparently, that narrative has played 'a fundamental role in Western societies'⁶. While one might agree, in the light of an analysis of past successes, that there is a need to engage and explore narrative forms – a tendency well represented in the work of the film-makers at the event – it is a worrying example of aesthetic absolutism to conclude that the 'failure' of the independent cinema rests on this 'dereliction' alone.⁷ In advance of a system of guaranteed distribution and a, probably necessary, policy of cross subsidisation, the best one can say is that independent films 'fail' because there has not been an effective presentation of the range of narrative forms before the general public.

Certainly, features of the classical narrative – a linear development from cause to effect,

⁴ Andrew Higson, 'The Discourses of British Film Year', *Screen*, January-February 1986, vol 27 no 1, p 87.

⁵ I am thinking here of Richard Dyer, but for a general view see Christine Gledhill, 'Introduction', *Star Signs*, London, BFI, 1982.

⁶ Sheila Whitaker, 'Declarations of Independence', in Martyn Auty and Nick Roddick (eds), *British Cinema Now*, London, BFI, 1985, p 93. A general argument about the epistemological centrality of narrative can be found in Will Wright, *Sixguns and Society*, University of California Press, 1975, chapter 4.

⁷ Though Whitaker, op cit, is fully aware of this fact, which unfortunately she leaves unresolved. Having advocated narratives, she then points out that the non-theatrical narrative is the hardest of all to distribute on p 94.

operating through personal forms of causality and identification⁸—are politically regressive and present special problems for progressive film-makers⁹. But it is by no means clear that popular audiences have a non-negotiable investment in the classical narrative. The evidence of an interest in para-narrative forms, such as musicals, action films, comedy, while hardly uniformly progressive, is sufficient to dispel any easy equation of narrativity and popularity.¹⁰ Nor is the supposition that the popularity of the classical narrative rests on its formalistic textual qualities alone entirely defensible. The attraction of the classical narrative may rest in part on the ease with which it delivers pleasure within the time constraints of a single viewing, a constraint which in itself requires a minimum of perceptual effort at the level of viewer engagement if it is to 'work' textually. At any rate, there can be no doubt that the longstanding practices of motion picture marketing and product design on the basis of consumer reaction rest on identifying the textual qualities, at the level of content and form, that meet with least consumer resistance.¹¹ Such procedures make clear that it is as much the expectations that audience bring to the screen as the formal qualities displayed there which account for the popularity of Hollywood films. Such institutional practices point yet again to the importance of developing more research on consumption in relation to content as well as form.

The second consideration relates to the authority of popular or, more precisely, casual consumption. At one level, of course, people 'know what they like' but what they like depends on what is provided, and how what is provided is ratified as a valid item of consumption for this or that subjectivity. To put this another way, one can say that taste should be defined as a personal history of consumption, valorized by some concept of what is acceptable for a given kind of subject.¹² One of the more immediate aspects of the formation of popular taste, as Simon Watney's presentation pointed out, is to be found in the discourse of popular criticism. While the necessary work remains to be done, it is clear enough that different critical discourses address and to this extent 'hail' different kinds of viewing subjects. In advance of a more systematic analysis¹³, it seems plausible to suggest that the more populist the review, the

more the 'meaning' of the text is rendered in terms of its direct psycho-physical impact on the viewer: horror films being rated in terms of a challenge to the viewer, presumably a male, to 'endure' with stoicism the pleasure of the text, which is 'getting the shit scared out of you—and loving it; an exchange mediated by adrenalin'¹⁴. It seems clear enough generally speaking, its modalities yet to be explored, that popular criticism derives its authority from its vigorous affirmation of individual choice as a private act without any immediate consequences, since it is in response to a set of desires always-already pre-given. It takes no imagination to realise that the subject of this discourse is in fact a variant of the consumer postulated by 'free market' ideologies of corporate capitalism, of which Hollywood has long (and not inconsiderably) been a part.¹⁵ What is more difficult to handle is the kind of transparent authority that this lends to the consumption patterns of the casual viewer—acknowledging that we are all that sometimes—not the least because such a discursive practice tends to render critical practices as prohibitive and authoritarian, or, more tellingly, to relativise them as just a matter of opinion.

But if the notion of the 'transparency of taste' provided a sub-text to the discussions of the day

⁸ See David Bordwell *et al*, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985, p 18 and Chapter 3, part one.

⁹ See Peter Gidal, 'Against Sexual Representation in Film', *Screen*, November-December 1984, vol 25 no 6, p 24ff.

¹⁰ This is certainly the case in the pre-history of the American cinema. See, for example, *Framework* 22/23 p 4 ff. In general terms, the post-modernist movement has signalled a developed interest in non-narrational forms. See, for example, Angela McRobbie, 'Postmodernism and Popular Culture' in *Postmodernism*, London, ICA Documents 5, 1986.

¹¹ For an example in relation to contemporary practices, see the account of the marketing of *Star Wars*, in B Austin (ed), *Current Research in Film: Audiences, Economics and Law*, vol 1, Ablex 1985.

¹² Cf Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984, *passim*.

¹³ See the remarks in S Jenkins, 'A critical impasse' in Martyn Auty and Nick Roddick, *op cit*. An early assessment is M Lounsbury, *The Origins of American Film Criticism 1909-1939*, Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania, 1966.

¹⁴ Philip Brophy, 'Horrority—The Textuality of Contemporary Horror Films', *Screen*, January-February 1986, vol 27 no 1, p 5.

¹⁵ For a general discussion, see A Hirschman, *Shifting Involvements*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1985, p 66 ff.

school, the second and, for that matter, constitutive counterpart of the consumer, the intentional creator or author, was more in evidence, not only in the discussion but within the contributions as well. It hardly needs rehearsing that there is a pronounced tendency in writing on film to subordinate textual and extra-textual relationships to the intention of key participants. The criticism of intentional accounts is founded on the belief—often justified—that an analysis that begins with participants' accounts ends there. Such a form of account entails an implicit, if not explicit, denial of the relative autonomy of textual and other practices. Further, since discursive practices predate the individual and in fact posit subjectivities into which individuals are reductively placed, the emphasis on intentionality can be argued to naively reproduce the originary and imaginary coherence of the subject. The notion of the actor as the origin of performance certainly surfaced during the discussion—one participant claiming to know that Jack Lemmon was a sincere person on the basis of his performances—and this resort to intention seems to be a chronic feature of accounts that work out from the context of production, especially where the object of analysis is performance. This even holds for accounts that are otherwise nuanced by a psychoanalytic problematic.¹⁶ The problem would therefore seem to be not to reject an intentional form of analysis but to establish the conditions under which it is valid.

But before moving over to the question of performance and intentionality, it is worth considering the conditions of reception insofar as these can be theorised as material supports for an intentional reading. The first of these is the obvious one, already alluded to, that the classical narrative is constructed around a personal form of causality. This construction, interwoven with the effects of the discursive practices of promotion, and advertising of the 'Gable's back and Garson's Got him!' variety, clearly promotes the view of the cinematic apparatus as a mere channel for the personal appetites and desires of the stars, a construction that popular and humanistic 'high' criticism does little to controvert.

A more speculative set of conditions can be added to these: popular involvement with stars

and the various projections of intentionality that this entails may rest on the very dispersive effects that textual analysis has identified. It is plausible to posit a cognitive need to contain the effects of dispersal, in respect of space and time, of film as a medium, much in the same way as Bordwell *et al* have argued that the continuity system in the classical Hollywood cinema developed to contain the 'disseminatory' tendencies of the diegesis.¹⁷ In a similar fashion, it can be suggested that an attachment to a person- (or in case of stars a persona-)centred reading of film may rest on the process of semiotisation of filmic space, which in the sphere of reception might otherwise present itself as a problem of attribution: which of the signs on screen are to be considered as consequential in respect of mobilising the action and which are to be 'backgrounded' as objects that 'merely' offer diegetic support? If it can be allowed that problems of attribution have some effect, then classical narration, which as Metz points out, necessarily posits a 'subject' as the source of what is narrated, can be seen as a resolution of complexity in favour of the linear simplicities of personal causality.¹⁸

Finally, though this already begs the question of the presence of the actor before the camera, it is possible to see a connection between the qualities of photography as a medium and a specific form of everyday knowledge. As Barthes points out, the question of the verisimilitude of the photographic image is transcended by the fact that every photograph is 'a certificate of presence' giving evidence of what was before the camera.¹⁹ If it is correct, as Barthes argues, that the property of evidence and the power of the 'punctum'—the moment of maximum engagement with the image—rests on the still image, then the attachment to intentionality—if seen as extending to the collection of personal items such as stills, gossip, biographical facts and other 'clues'—is evidence of a specific way of

¹⁶ see E Ann Kaplan, *Woman and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, London, Methuen, 1983, p 49 ff.

¹⁷ David Bordwell *et al*, op cit, part three.

¹⁸ Christian Metz, *Film Language*, Oxford University Press, 1974, p 16 ff. It is no accident, of course, that I make use of Metz' phenomenological phase here.

¹⁹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, London, Flamingo, 1984, p 85 ff especially.

reading film that downgrades the narrative in favour of the spectacle in order to maximise engagement. A personalised narrative form may thereby be seen as part of the same phenomenon of a wish to escape from the dispersal effects of other narrative forms, for if in Barthes' analysis cinema *per se* weakens the power of the referent, a narrative form that prioritises the presence of the star operates as a check on the loss of reference.

Such a process clearly rests on the postulation of an audience attachment to a particular mode of reasoning and manner of reading film. The evidence for this is scanty, but if one follows Carlo Ginzburg, then it is possible to suggest that a reading of film which sees performance as a trace or 'clue' to the personality of the *enactor* operates within a theory of causality which is necessarily anthropocentric. Such an analysis, which can be contrasted with those that attempt to establish non-individualising, law-governed sequences of causality, is clearly in evidence in a variety of popular discourses, not only those about the cinema which seem especially prolific, but in romance literature, news reporting, astrology, popular psychology and so on.²⁰

But this attempt to suggest audience-centred reasons for an intentional reading of film will probably strike some as an over-complication, since intentionality is so clearly a characteristic of performance *per se*. Performance rests on the presence of the actor (or performer in general) who is an intention-forming agent, deploying specifiable techniques and technologies of representation towards a specifiable end—character portrayal. Performance occurs in a setting socially marked out and specially designed for performance purposes (or specially adapted for such purposes) and entails the deployment of technologies that are structured as the media of purposive action—in this sense, an entirely random use of a camera entails intentionality.

The problem with a commonsense defence of intentional analysis, is not that it is entirely wrong—it does identify some of the material features of the actor's place in processes of representation—but rather that it conflates different levels of intention. At its most naive, when the cinematic apparatus is viewed as a mere channel, such a view rests on the much criticised *process* model of communication—the

sender (actor) encodes a message which is decoded, with a near complementarity of meaning, by the audience. This is not the place to explore the weaknesses of this model further. But to begin to undermine the obvious in its own terms, one has only to point out that acting before camera is very rarely in the mainstream cinema, e.g. Michael Caine in *Alfie*, a matter of direct address to camera. Secondly, it is not difficult to point to uses of actors (and non-actors) by directors, such as Bresson, that entail as an aesthetic, if not ethical, or political, principle the emptying out of all intentionality in performance. Equally it is possible to argue within the framework of Diderot's paradox, that a craft that specialises in the studied representation of emotion requires in the actor a technique of non-involvement. More could be said on the matter of acting styles and, indeed, the contribution of John Caughie and the *Acting Tapes* were concerned to explore the contradictions in the discourse of naturalism and to chart alternatives.

If the process model of communication is unsound as a support for intentionality, is it still possible to find valid grounds for an intentional analysis in respect of performance? I think there is, if we regard acting as part of the discursive practices of work, including in these both patterns of organisation and accounts of activities. These practices routinely construct—though whether necessarily is another issue—a division of labour in which some participants are seen as the origin of the preferred reading of the text. All participants in the production process are required to operate with this preferred reading of text and with it recognise a discursively identified originary subject as the 'author'. In other words, it is necessary to distinguish, especially in the case of collective forms of production, between the author as the subject of the preferred reading and those who recognise this preferred meaning as the terms of their participation—in the case of film, of course, such a process can be retroactive, but this does not alter the basic line of the argument.

In terms of acting in the mainstream cinema, I have suggested (along with others) that it is

²⁰ Carlo Ginzburg, 'Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method', *History Workshop*, 9.

possible to identify two preferred readings of the actor's participation: (a) as an impersonator of a character that supports the narrative and usually the authority of the director; (b) as a personifier, that is as an embodiment of the persona, which is a transfilmić, and even transcinematic, 'character' that is reductively referenced as belonging to the real person of the star. Both these strategies entail intentionality – that is to say require the conscious action of the actor towards filling out a collectively given subjectivity – but the line of intentionality is differently ordered and hence has a different ideological effectivity on the discursive practices of acting. The problem is that these different practices are very often confounded. In part, because the same actor may modulate between these strategies during his or her career, or even in the space of a particular film. In part, because casting may proceed according to the everyday characteristics of the professional actor (or non-professional actor) since these approximate to the requirements of characterisation. In part, because, ironically, both actors 'being themselves' and actors utilising the maximum of manipulative skills of impersonation appear to 'naturally' occupy the character on screen. In this case, actors who have learned to look good or relaxed on camera and actors who look convincing as character are conflated by the image. But probably, in the case of the casual viewer, this conflation also proceeds from the discursive practices of mainstream criticism and adulation, which valorise the actor as the authorial centre of the text.

In this respect, Nicholas Le Prevost's

contribution to the day school provided an ironic confirmation of the effects of this subsidiary discursive practice. As an actor trained for the stage and for professional norms of impersonation, his engaging and frank admission of the difficulties of acting without a clear point of address, or an opportunity to develop, in rehearsal, characterisation, provided a vivid demonstration of the fact that at the level of his appearance on screen these uncertainties were not apparent. In the place of discontinuity and contradiction, stood the submerging, cohering richness and givenness of the image. It is here that a naturalistic account must give ground to the theorisation of identification. But it is also here that some might be tempted to remark that actors are 'lucky people' in that even a bad performance in terms of the standards of the profession may seem successful through the recuperative action of the apparatus. But there is a price. In fact, there are several, but I have in mind the one that the day school succeeded in bringing to the surface. To the glamorous completeness of the image, its apparent efficacy in containing and framing the popular interest in actors and acting, corresponds a lack of appreciation – or at least a sense that such an understanding is a barrier to enjoyment – of the harsh occupational realities, affecting film-makers and actors alike, of under- and unemployment, lack of public recognition of craft or status for the profession as a whole, the few stars notwithstanding. One of the greater benefits of the day, to me at least, was to have travelled some way down the road to this kind of understanding.

COLONIALISM AND 'LAW AND ORDER' CRITICISM

BY TESHOME H. GABRIEL

Among the Ewe people of Southern Ghana, the High God is an androgynous figure called Mawu-Lisa, 'Mawu' being the female principle and 'Lisa' the male. In translating the Bible into the Ewe language, the female component was severed from the androgynous name. The Ewe rejected this concept of a one-sided High God, and despite the most brutal acts of 'law and order' visited on them by the 'civilising mission', have to the present time remained predominantly animist.

The legacy of colonialism has not only defined the Third World as non-Western but it has also made the West non-Third World. This has given the Western person a world view and a readiness to regard his/her activities as the 'mainstream'. The 'Super Bowl' and the 'World Series' reinforce a world view governed by an obsession for superlatives in all spheres of life; one can easily characterise this era as the age of hyperbole. What is culturally specific is viewed as a phenomenon engulfing the globe. Even when noble causes with good intentions and positive results are involved, with implications far greater than cultural specificity, global annexation is obvious. Such is the case, for instance, with the all-star fund-raising hymn for hunger, 'We Are the World' where 'we are' functions as a determinant, thus turning into a borderland the very people that are being aided. The Third World continues to be viewed as 'dependent', 'peripheral' or 'marginal', *not because the Third World is marginal per se, but because it is marginalised in, and by, colonial discourse.*

In this era when even mosquitoes have adapted

to DDT it is understandable that the intellectual heirs of colonial ideology have readjusted their rhetoric too. Nowadays, First World intellectuals enthuse over their global focus, and this idea is not new. Ten years ago, Immanuel Wallerstein made it a mark of his 'World System Theory'. For Wallerstein there is only one World Capitalist System, whose principal categories are 'core' and 'periphery', where the 'core' is the determinant of relations of exchange. He quotes Karl Marx, trying to enlist him in his interpretation. But for Wallerstein, besides pre- and non-capitalism there is no post-capitalist formation. For him 'socialism' is subsumed under the general category of 'non-capitalisms'. Accordingly, no Third World country can become socialist.¹ Third World countries can move from one peripheral status to a semi-periphery within the capitalist mode; change can only be of degree rather than of kind.

In *Screen's* special issue, 'Other Cinemas, Other Criticisms', the lead article by Julianne Burton, 'Marginal Cinemas and Mainstream Critical Theory', proposes a most troubling example of critical theory along the lines of Wallerstein's core and periphery. There is a perfect fit here between Wallerstein's 'World System Theory' and Burton's 'Cinema-as-Spectacle':

Third World film-makers can attempt to supplant the spectacle with a non- (or pre-) spectacular by

¹ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, New York, Academic Press, 1974.

*substituting some indigenous/autonomous discourse whose 'otherness' is almost inevitably one of degree rather than kind.*²

Just as 'socialism' is not only non-capitalism but 'Socialism', so also is Third World cinema not only non-spectacle but Third World cinema. The 'otherness' is not only one of degree but also of kind. 'Third Cinema' attempts to draw attention to this fact. To hold on to the modes of operation and discourse of dominant cinema is counter to Third Cinema practice. The discourse strategy of Third Cinema has a more political and ideological social focus. This Julianne Burton seems unable to understand – not all Third World film texts qualify as 'Third Cinema'. The territory is *not* the map. Third Cinema in the Third World is anti-imperialist, militant and confrontational cinema. It is neither pre- nor non-Cinema as Spectacle; it is, as Fernando Birri in the same issue of *Screen* puts it, 'an active cinema for an active spectator' – *it is* 'a cinema of and for liberation'.³

II

In her article in *Screen*, Burton argues that the 'claim to transparency and unity of meaning' of Third Cinema texts is not only unattainable but impossible. She denies this ideological transparency in Third Cinema practices not because they have any hidden or 'unconscious' agenda but precisely because, as she suggests, 'they are potentially intimidating in their resistance to assimilation.' Such arguments tend to obscure the proven resistance of the Third Cinema text.

The issue of transparency should be looked at within a specific cultural-historical context. What is not transparent for a Western viewer is transparent enough in its own context. For instance, Third World ethnographic films tend to be viewed as political in the country of their origin, while they are viewed as exotica outside it. Similarly, an American fiction film seen overseas may be regarded as a documentary on American life. First time visitors to the USA often have a strange nostalgic feeling about the New York skyline or the Statue of Liberty. They have never been there before but they have 'already seen it' in their past. Folks, it's the

movies! Obviously, the West is more than the Third World's exotica. Similarly, the Third World, is also 'already read', as a lack by the West.

A dialogue between the West and the Third World is always a welcome endeavour. But what blocks such efforts is the historical mishap they suffered and are locked into, namely colonialism and imperialism. This has made reciprocity and peaceful co-existence difficult to achieve. The Third World has always tried to incorporate the West in its culture and developmental schemes. The fact that more Third World people speak European languages than Westerners speak Third World languages is a case in point. But it is the conflictual one-sidedness of the West that defeats and frustrates meaningful communication, because of its unceasing desire for colonial enclaves as well as cultural synchronisation with itself. *The barrier to real dialogue is thus the terms of dialogue itself.* Consequently, in its desire to globalise and homogenise world cinema and cultures, critical theory is also implicated.

Burton's inability to understand the specific ideological predicaments of the Third World's cultural politics undermines the basis of her criticism of Third Cinema. If it is agreed that the Third World is characterised by underdevelopment and the 'lingering heritage' of colonial exploitation, cannot unequal economic exchange carry over into unequal symbolic exchange? For instance, Burton sets up proponents of 'cultural decolonisation' in the Third World as though their only desire is a return to 'pre-colonial innocence'. This, of course, denies them any awareness of their history. Burton uses a selective quotation from Eduardo Galeano to legitimate her assertion that 'cultural decolonisation' is 'a pervasive but illusory goal'. She would be fairer to the spirit of Galeano's article had she also quoted the following, which speaks the opposite of what she claimed:

² Julianne Burton, 'Marginal Cinemas and Mainstream Critical Theory', *Screen* May-August 1985, vol 26 nos 3-4, p 13. All other citations are included in the text.

³ Fernando Birri, 'For a Nationalist Realist, Critical and Popular Cinema', *Screen* May-August 1985, vol 26 nos 3-4, p 90.

*In general, it can truly be said that many education centers and almost all the massive communication media radiate translated messages, fabricated outside and designed to drain the Latin American memory and prevent it from recognizing its own reality and capacity: they induce it to consume and passively reproduce the symbols of the very power that humbles it.*⁴

In the same issue of *Screen* Julio García Espinosa comments on a similar misunderstanding of his idea of an 'Imperfect Cinema'. 'Many people thought it was about making bad films'. According to Espinosa, this does not set up an either/or situation in terms of good and bad films, but judges from a cultural ideological perspective that encompasses the ideology of the work and the artistry of the maker.⁵ As Glauber Rocha had intimated, 'technique is closer to ideology than to aesthetics.' A critic brought up in a tradition which extols artistry above all else would assume that 'an Imperfect Cinema' was about making bad films. And if the critic belonged to the so-called 'mainstream critical theory' group, he/she would try to support that assumption with selective quotations.

In her eagerness to explicate a 'critical theory' based on a vague form she calls 'psychodynamics', Burton misquotes and misrepresents *Third Cinema in the Third World*. Her appropriation and [mis]use of the original text is presented here:

For Gabriel, the exploration of the psychodynamics of signification in Third World films is just as unnecessary as ideological interrogation, for Third Cinema 'does not function on a psychological or mythic level but rather takes up an explicit position with respect to an ideological or social topic'. (p 16)

Here I provide the original text as it appeared in *Third Cinema in the Third World*:

*In Third Cinema point of view does not function on a psychological or mythic level per se but rather takes up an explicit position with respect to an ideological or social topic.*⁶

Burton then goes on to say that leading critics of socially-committed arts, 'posited the social-historical component of character in addition to rather than in place of the psychological' (p 16) – the very point that, but for her deletions, I made.

This misquotation/misrepresentation is not merely the result of a basic difference between the two texts shown above. The root cause is ideological and lies in the incompatibility of stated approaches to the 'aesthetics of social pleasure'. As Terry Lovell points out in the paragraphs subsequent to those quoted by Burton, 'aesthetic sensibilities are class- and sex-linked, and the politics of aesthetic pleasure will depend on the particular ways in which that sensibility has been appropriated and developed along lines of sex and class.'⁷ The question then is: *Whose aesthetics? Whose pleasure?* It is not transhistorical or transcultural. Rather, it is a question of who develops it, for whom, under what conditions and along what lines? Burton would rather the West define it for the Third World. Third Cinema insists the people of the Third World do it for themselves.

More than 'the aesthetics of pleasure', therefore, the issue is one of activist aesthetics and the conditions for it. The question of social pleasure, for the Third World film-maker is not a theoretical question but a practical one; more than a condition of psychological alienation, it is a political issue of bread and butter.

To say, as Burton does, that 'oppositional cultural practices from the Third World bear the promise of unifying the presently polarised view of culture' by 'challenging cultural critics to recognise and articulate pleasure and desire as social rather than exclusively individual experiences' (p 21), is to credit Third World film language and practice with what it does not do. Third Cinema, presents 'another' film practice that cannot be adequately explicated by Western critical theory of 'pleasure' and 'desire'.⁸ This Third World film-makers have said time and time again. As the Cuban director Jorge Fraga puts it, 'We are not in favor of firing merely for

⁴ Eduardo Galeano, 'The Revolution as Revelation,' (trans by Walter I Bradbury), *Socialist Review*, no 65, September-October 1982, p 9.

⁵ Julio García Espinosa, 'Meditations on an Imperfect Cinema', *Screen* May-August 1985, vol 26 nos 3-4, pp 93-94.

⁶ Teshome Gabriel, *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation*, Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1982, p 7.

⁷ Terry Lovell, *Pictures of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics, Pleasure*, London, BFI, 1980, p 95.

the pleasure of hearing the shot. We shoot in order to hit the target."⁹

III

*As the honorary president of the Entro de Capacitacion Cinematografica in Mexico City, I once went to visit the school and was introduced to several professors, including a young man in a suit and tie who blushed a good deal. When I asked him what he taught, he replied, 'The Semiology of the Clonic Image.' I could have murdered him on the spot. By the way, when this kind of jargon (a typically Parisian phenomenon) works its way into the educational system, it wreaks absolute havoc in underdeveloped countries. It's the clearest sign, in my opinion, of cultural colonialism.*¹⁰

It is indeed a sad commentary, particularly coming from such a prominent director as Luis Bunuel, but it is precisely when Third World intellectual activity is solely European-flavoured that it runs the risk of being obtrusive, obscure and irrelevant. This kind of semiotic intellectual of the Third World is of course more at home in a European atmosphere than in his or her own. Bunuel's scepticism is shared by Third World film-makers, but it should be regarded as an opposition to 'Ivory Tower Semiotics' and not as a dismissal of semiotics. As Marshall Blonsky tartly observed, 'the reason the discourse has never "taken" – never become, itself... – is that action would be threatened by it.'¹¹

This issue brings out in force the reason why Third World film-makers/scholars should not be forced always to think in a sign system that is not theirs. The question is whether the categories that inform Western semiotics are fully relevant to the analysis of non-Western sign systems. Western semiotics has presumed that its categories can travel across cultures and languages. But language is saturated with the values of its own culture. To think in a language other than one's own, is to experience a peculiar form of alienation – a kind of self-exile. Besides, Western semiotics has not developed a strategy to explain the specific mode of transformation required by the Third World context where semiotics should be an instrument of political action. This has been largely ignored and underdeveloped. It is now imperative to formulate Third Cinema semiotics in terms of its

relation between Third World concepts and its own artistic mode to develop forms of explanation that account for its specificity.

The position of the spectator in the Western cinema is different from the position of the spectator in Third Cinema. The theorisation of the Western spectator within the Althusserian framework views the subject as passive and mystified. This has been the cornerstone of the ideological critique of Western cinema. Western cinema represents and replays these mystified social relations. Third Cinema by contrast maintains that the relation between the Third World audience in Third Cinema is one of immediate ideological lucidity. As the exiled Chilean film-maker Miguel Littin states, 'We maintain that a cinema based upon our objectives necessarily implies a different kind of critical evaluation; and we affirm that the greatest critic of a revolutionary film is the people to whom it is directed, who have no need for mediators to defend and interpret for them.' Indeed, the politicised spectator of the Third World film who has an ideological and semiotic grip of the text does not need, as Burton suggested, 'a mediating agency, an advocate in the guise of a film critic... or other certified "expert"' (p. 5), because this spectator, as an agent of the historical process, sees in films the concrete realisation of his/her political and material circumstances.

The issue at stake here is ideological – it disclaims value-free semiotics. Littin's statement should therefore be read as a call for ideological mediation which is sensitive to the cultural and ideological needs of both the film-maker and the

⁸ The quest for 'pleasure' and 'desire' within the Lacanian rereading of Freud suggests the notion of sexual difference. There is, however, no cultural reading of either Freud or Lacan in film texts in the Third World. Here, the social paradigm stands for the sexual paradigm as the generator of excess. In Third Cinema 'pleasure' and 'desire' are set forth as revolutionary agencies. For further reading on this issue, see Richard Lichtman, *The Production of Desire*, New York, The Free Press, 1982, and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, New York, The Viking Press, 1977.

⁹ Quoted in Peter Steven (ed) *Jump Cut: Hollywood, Politics and Counter-cinema, Between the Lines*, Toronto, 1985, p. 351.

¹⁰ Luis Bunuel, *My Last Sigh: The Autobiography of Luis Bunuel*, New York, Alfred A Knopf, Inc, 1983, p. 222.

¹¹ Marshall Blonsky (ed), *On Signs*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1985, p. 36.

audience. Third Cinema practices maintain that the Third World audience has an active and essentially constructive relation to the sign systems of Third World cinema. The spectator activates the sense of the text. When Julio García Espinosa quoting Marx entones, 'in the future there will no longer be painters but rather men who, among other things, dedicate themselves to painting'¹², he is proposing the mission of Third Cinema – to make every spectator/reader ideologically astute.

Why is it that structurally, semiotics underplays history and everyday existence? Because, as Blonsky observed:

*Semiotics has been a futile gaze at the world's seeming pleasures, its drunken stupidities; and it may all the while have been imaginary, the way in which we, semiotic intellectuals, have wanted to be loved and respected. No, a critic will answer me, semiotics can also be unpolitical, unideological. It can yield up a renewed joy every time we see the functioning of the world's semantic organization. Studying poetry, painting, narrative and so on, we learn that the world is an immense message, we enjoy all the intelligence of everything that is intelligible. To which we can respond: but spying out the world's meanings, you have spied out its misery once more. Meaning is an instrument, a conduit of power.*¹³

Why is it that a cine-structuralist variant of the Semiotic Inquiry is a calculated affront to common sense? When meaning is readily accessible, it seeks answers elsewhere, and in the process the subject, the lives and struggles of human beings, gets lost in the shuffle. The issue is whether to regard structure or structuring absences as the meaning of a text or to consider the significance of the text by its place in the social context. Western semiotics, as a deciphering operation, not only dismisses the 'obvious' and the 'habitual' as false consciousness but also sets out to marginalise competing ideological interpretation. *The question is not whether one can escape semiotics, but rather to understand that all sign systems are implicated in ideology.*

What then is Third Cinema semiotics? The following, inasmuch as they can shed more light on the current debate, should be regarded as the main concern of Third Cinema semiotics.

1. To explicate and interrogate the kinds of intuitive knowledge spectators bring to the process.
2. To clear the ideological confusion that surrounds semiotic inquiry into cross-cultural studies.
3. To wed political economy of the signifier to critical theory of the text, and above all, To emphasise the 'ideological' as opposed to the 'psychological' spectator.

Here you have it: semiotics of everyday life, cross-cultural semiotics, the political economy of the social sign and, finally, a semiotics rooted in the dialectics of struggle. Semiotics can no longer afford to overlook these concerns of Third Cinema and alienate, or be alienated by, those who act in it.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to the realisation of the semiotic project is those texts of Third Cinema that are resistant to the absorption tendencies of 'mainstream' critical theory. Third Cinema texts exist within both ideology and history and thus need the application of a bonded historiography and semiotics for meaningful explication.

IV

The concept of 'Third World' has been strongly attacked by scholars both from the USSR¹⁴ and the USA due to its non-differentiation between one super-power and the other in their relation to the Third World. Burton also dismissed the concept by calling it, 'a signifier without a signified, a term without a referent' (p 11). This is a neither/nor situation and is, at best, agnostic thinking. Once she has dismissed the term, she nevertheless continues to use it, equating it with 'less Westernised', 'dependent', 'non-Western' and 'marginal', as if all these terms of analysis are the same. If Burton does not acknowledge the concept exists, what then is her article about?

What is one to make of the Third World

¹² Quoted in Michael Chanan (ed), *Twenty-five Years of Latin American Cinema*, London, BFI-Channel Four, 1983, p 29.

¹³ Marshall Blonsky, op cit, p 35, emphasis added.

¹⁴ See Y Zhukov, et al, *The Third World*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1970.

alliance within the United Nations in which these countries quite frequently take a unified stand on issues of mutual concern? So long as we recognise 'first world' and 'second world' there will always be a 'third world'. These labels are relational; they have an instrumental value, not an absolute one. The real reasons for denying the term legitimacy lie in its connotations of 'power' and 'united front' as the basis of global differentiation.¹⁵

Burton's dismissal of the concept of 'Third Cinema' is, therefore, quite understandable, because it too connotes power and united front. 'Third Cinema' challenges the hegemonic hold of Cinema-as-Spectacle. Indeed, the concept of Third Cinema is unified in its difference from Hollywood or mainstream cinema. For Burton to allege that the term has been 'widely questioned by many Third World film-makers and flatly rejected by others' (p 6), because of its Peronist associations, is guilt by association. It would have been useful to have had a relevant reference of her allegation at this point.

According to Burton, 'cultural impermeability between dominant and dependent cultures... does not exist' (p 9). Have you ever watched a Third World film with native viewers of that culture? To do so is to find the 'untranslatable' and 'unparaphraseable' nuances of culture foregrounded by two distinct responses: from those following the sub-titles and those following the direct address. While one group struggles to fashion a linear narrative, the other is engaged in intellectual and emotional involvement, be it in chuckles, choruses of laughter or other forms of response. Cultural impermeability cannot be simply wished away.

Mythical consciousness and folk narrative poetics are specific elements of Third World film texts. The specificities of each Third World culture are unities in their own settings, but they are also unities measured against differences within a Third World context. This relationship is a dialectical one; rather than oppositional it is a relationship marked by differences of strategies for development. The 'mainstream' paradigm, on the other hand, is measured by production values and the trajectory of technical brilliance. If, as it currently seems, mainstream cinema needs 40 million dollars plus for the sheer quality of its production, Third Cinema practices can live without it. The unifying impulse that originally

spurred Third Cinema was and is a need for the primacy of subject matter over material considerations. To know this is to acknowledge the energy of social commitment and vision concentrated or lodged within it. Consequently, as I've suggested elsewhere¹⁶, we need to attend to a new critical theory that takes into account cultural resistance to domination as its prime rhetorical strategy. A genuine cross-cultural system of exchange, a cross fertilisation of ideas, can only occur if the notion that there cannot be discourse without meta-discourse/message without meta-message is reconsidered in light of text and context.

To imply that mainstream critical theory should dominate and assimilate all others because of its position of power, is to speak only in economic terms and to collapse everything else, including social concerns into it. As Bunuel has observed:

*It seems clear to me that without the enormous influence of the canon of American culture, Steinbeck would be an unknown, as would Dos Passos and Hemingway. If they'd been born in Paraguay or Turkey, no one would ever have read them, which suggests the alarming fact that the greatness of a writer is in direct proportion to the power of his country.*¹⁷

In this period of world hunger, nuclear threat, ideologised racism, the Debt Trap and violent conflicts in Central America, natural disasters in Mexico and Colombia, the 'great' film directors of the West, would have been mere footnotes in history, had it not been for the economic power of their countries, and such notables as Nelson Pereira dos Santos of Brazil, Ousmane Sembène of Senegal, Thomas Gutiérrez Alea of Cuba, Mirinal Sen of India, Fernando Birri and Fernando Solanas of Argentina, Miguel Littin of Chile and several North American and European

¹⁵ For an introduction to the term and concept of 'Third World', see SD Muine, 'The Third World: Concept and Controversy', *Third World Quarterly*, vol 1 no 3, 1979, pp 118-128.

¹⁶ See my article, 'Towards Critical Theory of Third World Films', *Third World Affairs*, 1985, Third World Foundation for Social and Economic Studies, London, January 1985, pp 355-369.

¹⁷ Luis Bunuel, *op cit*, p 222.

146 progressive film-makers, active in Nicaragua, El Salvador, the Middle East, South Africa, would have been the actual luminaries of this era.

Of course, mainstream critical theory operates under the 'myth of the monolith' and tends to forget that there is another West, whose main concern is also social and political and whose struggles to liberate cinema compares with that of the Third World. Too often these film-makers are also ghettoised in just the same way as the Third World film-makers. As Peter Steven has observed:

*Variety magazine and its rave reports of 'box office magic' represent the voice of dominant cinema.... But at the same time there are other, different voices – different languages – calling for radically new types of films, and for a new approach to cinema. These voices don't have the backing of Wall Street and Madison Avenue but they are present nevertheless and very active in parallel nooks and crannies in North America and beyond, and especially in the Third World.*¹⁸

If anyone should claim credit for ushering in, and popularising, Third World film in Western universities and cinemas, it is this progressive voice, and not, as Burton implies, the academic institutions *per se*. Progressive faculty, students and film journals in the US and Europe have played an important role. However, the claim to be allied with this movement is not in itself an indication of solidarity with the goal of cultural liberation. What is called for, above all else, is a more coherent and constructive understanding and practice than that espoused by Burton's concluding remarks:

A view of culture in which the realm of ideological significance is not incompatible with the realm of personal enrichment (because personal enrichment is also viewed as a social phenomenon) would free Western critics from the onerous role of 'diagnostician of pathologies', reaffirming instead their function as guide and celebrant. (p 21)

Progressive Western voices who have grasped the ideological agenda of decolonisation and liberation of Third Cinema have allied in co-productions and other forms of critical solidarity with Third World progressives to bring about, in the words of Glauber Rocha, the overthrow of 'the world cinematic language' under 'the

dictatorship of Coppola and Godard.'¹⁹ In this spirit, Julio García Espinosa has said, 'Cinema can be constructed on the ashes of what already exists. Moreover, to make a new cinema is, in fact, to reveal the process of destruction of the spectacle.... We have to make a spectacle out of the destruction of the spectacle.'²⁰ When this is accomplished, it is then and only then that Burton's hopes would be realised and using her own words, Western critics, would be freed 'from the onerous role of 'diagnostician of pathologies', reaffirming not 'their function as guide' (*whose guide?*) but as co-celebrants of the social institution of cinema and the human arts.

V

Critical theory is not an innocent discipline, nor is it an 'objective' phenomenon. Like any theory of social change, it has blind spots and limits. It is today a battleground. The pivotal question should rather be, to what end is 'mainstream' critical theory directed? Of what use are such analytic tools? To what degree are they in fact tools of oppression rather than liberation? Critical theory cannot be a method of perpetual alienation, but a guide and tool for liberation. Critical theory perhaps, as never before, is symbiotically linked to the propositions of political economy:

*In its concept of an ultimate goal, critical theory did not intend to replace the theological hereafter with a social one.... It only makes explicit what was always the foundation of its categories: the demand that through the abolition of previously existing material conditions of existence the totality of human relations be liberated.... In the theoretical reconstruction of the social process, the critique of current conditions and the analysis of their tendencies necessarily include future-oriented components.*²¹

This then is the theory-praxis nexus that the

¹⁸ Peter Steven, *op cit*, p 15.

¹⁹ Glauber Rocha, *Revolução do Cinema Novo*, Rio de Janeiro, Alhambra/Embrafilme, 1981, p 467.

²⁰ Quoted in Peter Steven, *op cit*, p 357.

²¹ Herbert Marcuse, 'Philosophy and Critical Theory,' *Negations*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1968, p 145.

Third World film practice suggests. Today, it bears a clear signal of *power relations* within a given society. But it cannot, and should not, be opaque to that power, or it will cease to be. The expressed desire of the Western intellectual, touring in Third World discourse, is that the Third World abdicate or surrender its theoretical concerns and responsibilities to the West. This Third Cinema film-makers understand all too well. To them film-making has always been a political act. They have been incarcerated, exiled and killed not because of the lack of their own critical theory but, in fact, precisely because of it.²²

To think of 'Other Cinemas' in terms of the spectacle only is disastrous. To dismiss the social and/or revolutionary functions of 'Other Criticisms' as 'defensive' is an even graver error. To belittle the efforts of Third Cinema practitioners, by design or default, leads too quickly to the temptation to speak for them by constructing one's own fictions. This cultural negation, this mechanism of confinement and totalisation, and this system of unequal cultural and symbolic exchange, are not evidence of a theory of liberation, but rather of 'law and order' criticism.

Marx's letter to Arnold Ruge, September 1843, remains the last word on the subject:

Nothing prevents us therefore from starting our criticism with criticism of politics, with taking sides in politics hence with actual struggles, and identifying ourselves with them. Then we do not face the world in doctrinaire fashion with a new principle, declaring, Here is truth, kneel here! We develop new principles for the world out of the principles of the world. We do not tell the world, Cease your struggles, they are stupid; we want to give you the true watchword of the struggles. We merely show the world why it actually struggles, and the awareness of this is something which the world must acquire even if it does not want to.

I would like to thank particularly, Martin Blythe, Scott Cooper, Ronnie Serr and Billy Woodbury for their critical comments on this paper. I have also appreciated the insightful remarks of the following: INC Aniebo, David Iyam, Naguib Ktiri, Hamid Naficy, Ramiah Shanker and Esther Yau.

Teshome Gabriel and Julianne Burton will be speaking at a conference on 'Third Cinema: Theories and Practices' at the Edinburgh Film Festival, August 11-13, 1986.

²² For a partial list of Latin American film-makers, jailed, exiled or killed, see, 'In Latin America They Shoot Filmmakers', *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1976, pp 160-61.

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REAL LIVES AND DISAPPEARING WORLDS: A REPORT ON A FESTIVAL OF ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM

BY KEITH TRIBE

'There are times during this lengthy chronicle of day-to-day life among the Maasai of Kenya that one suspects producer Melissa Llewelyn-Davies merely left the cameras rolling while she and her crew went off to do something more interesting. Much of tonight's episode cropped up in last week's opener, or seemed to, at least.' Thus the TV programme notes for the second episode of *Diary of a Maasai Village* confronting readers of the *Swindon Evening Advertiser* on July 2, 1984. In fact this response to the screening of Melissa Llewelyn-Davies' two latest films of the Maasai by the BBC in June and July of 1984 was among the two or three negative comments which were far outweighed by general critical acclaim. Curiously, the most dismissive review was written by Hugh Hebert in the *Guardian* (June 18, 1984); while the *Daily Telegraph's* reviewer enthusiastically recommended the series as 'compulsive viewing' (July 9, 1984).

British television has become one of the principal supporters of documentary and ethnographic film¹, financing projects and delivering an audience to film-makers and anthropologists. 'TV ethnography' became identified in the 1970s with Granada's

Disappearing World series, in which Llewelyn-Davies made two films on the Maasai – *Maasai Women* and *Maasai Manhood* (1974-5). With the effective demise of the series in 1977, Llewelyn-Davies and her husband Chris Curling began work for the BBC. The first series of films that they made under the title of *Worlds Apart* maintained the conventions of *Disappearing World* – a film of around 55 minutes shot with a small crew adhering to the principles of documentary realism, built around a small number of identifiable characters and their daily lives, broadcast with a minimum of commentary and with all speech subtitled.

Granada TV had perhaps a dozen slots per year for serious documentary films, which were at the most elementary level a means for the company to advertise its commitment to 'serious' TV and thus assure its commercial future when the franchise was up for renewal. But Granada's

¹ Despite the dismissive remark of a British TV executive when shown the MacDougall's *To Live with Herds* – 'It could never be shown on British TV', quoted in Peter Loizos, 'Granada Television's Disappearing World Series: An Appraisal', *American Anthropologist* vol 82 (1980), p 55.

150 commitment went further: copies of the films were donated to the film library of the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI) for educational hire, and all unused footage was carefully filed. In principle, any researcher with a genuine interest in this material can have access to it. The company thus treated the films as something more than window-dressing; they represented part of its contribution to a tradition of 'committed' documentary film-making.

Transferred to the BBC, the situation altered somewhat. The output of the BBC which can be included under the heading 'documentary' is both extensive and varied. Divorced from an association with Granada's investigative *World in Action* series (for which Chris Curling made a film on Queensland Aboriginal people and the activities of mining companies), Llewelyn-Davies and Curling found themselves having to work out of the Natural History unit of the BBC in Bristol. True, the BBC is renowned for its technically innovative filming of the lives of badgers, foxes and the domestic cat, but a unit preoccupied with the problems of filming animals is not necessarily equipped to deal with bicycling hunter-gatherers in Venezuela (*The Panare*, directed by Chris Curling, anthropologist Paul Henley). And this highlights the problem in ethnographic film-making of 'scientific' content. In West Germany, for instance, the Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film promotes ethnographic film-making, in the absence of a significant challenge from TV, as a work of 'scientific record'; a typical contribution to its record of contemporary German society is a recent film on Bavarian roof-tile making. Ethnographic film, as it is understood in an Anglo-American context at least, is the product of a conjunction of a documentary tradition (from Flaherty and Grierson on) with an increasingly sophisticated modern discipline of social anthropology. The linking of film-making processes drawn from the principles of documentary realism with the substance of modern ethnology opens up a range of possibilities, from the 'academic' record of specific rituals, behaviours and events to the 'popular' representation of the lives of 'other peoples'. The criteria to be applied in individual cases across this spectrum are neither clear nor generalised.

At the time of writing, the BBC is screening

two general series which deal with 'social issues': *Real Lives* and *40 Minutes*. A notorious example in the first series, *At the Edge of the Union*, gains its overall coherence from Ulster politics and is structured around the conflicting views expressed by two leading protagonists, in public and in private, making use of the latter to present the 'private' side of public men. The notoriety of the film derived largely from government disapproval that the BBC should allow a Sinn Féin leader this kind of hearing.

On the other hand, a recent *40 Minutes* programme, *Forget-Me-Not*, makes use, in its portrayal of the selection process for Miss Poland 1985, of a range of filming and editing devices familiar now to the viewing public—eavesdropping on private conversations, recording moments of personal crisis, establishing the location and limits of action in the process of editing, and so on. In TV fiction, it is not unusual to discover that a space of action is a compound of 'real' locations scattered across the country—the front of this house, the back of that, the interior of a third and so on. Such a procedure is not, however, permissible in documentary: the 'ethic of realism' commands that the 'apparent' space constructed in a sequence of shots correspond to the 'real' space, and that this should in some way be established with respect to time as well. *Forget-Me-Not* uses documentary forms but seemed to violate documentary principles.

A wide variety of films is made by the BBC under the heading 'documentary'. The themes and subjects treated in *Real Lives* and *40 Minutes* have some kind of inherent 'entertainment/cultural' value. By contrast any film with 'ethnographic' pretensions has to survive measurement against standards that are more academic in nature. More generally, the filming of ethnography, rather than its writing, introduces questions of 'realism' and 'truth' which are embedded in the documentary tradition and film technique. That TV has become an important medium for ethnographic film today merely raises again basic questions of the functions of ethnographic film.

Some of these issues were given an airing at the Royal Anthropology Institute's International Festival of Ethnographic Film, a programme of events organised in association with the National Film and Television School in London during

late September 1985. Three main bodies of work were presented and discussed: the *Disappearing World* series, as represented by a trilogy of films on the Mursi of Ethiopia; the films of the MacDougalls; and the films of Jean Rouch and his students. There was at the same time a screening of Llewelyn-Davies' *The Women's Olamal* at the London Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA). As ever at such festivals, discussion did not follow any clear line of development. This is no doubt due in part to a contemporary difficulty with the terms and issues that could guide such discussion – participants seemed unsure of themselves when confronted with film ethnography, and often reacted by first treating the film as a simple narrative, which could then be discussed in terms of its 'content' as any other 'story'. Film-makers in turn tended to respond with tales of how the film was made, by which they meant how it was shot – film-makers and anthropologists alike still seem to have difficulty in the analysis of the film text as it is constructed.

David and Judith MacDougall's first film *To Live with Herds* (1969) – a work of such innovation that all their subsequent films appear to either repeat the same themes, or at worst, fail to repeat the earlier success – deals with the life of the Jie of Northern Uganda: domestic routine, the distribution of flour for famine relief, a meeting with local administrators. Within any one particular phase of the film, cutting between participants is largely avoided. Occasionally the camera position changes, otherwise it remains static, providing a frame into and out of which people move, and within which some (subtitled) conversation takes place. The film shows actions and events as they unfold; the pace is unforced, the narrative inconclusive. The film is constructed to approximate the deliberate pace of life among the Jie, rather than to produce a didactic overview.

A later film by the MacDougalls underlines this technique, although in this case the film possesses a definite structure by virtue of the events concerned. *Takeover* was made in Queensland during 1980 when the Aurukun Aboriginal Reserve was threatened with the assumption of management by the Queensland government instead of the Uniting Church. The film-makers were already working there when this happened, so they were able (at the request

of the community) to film the confrontation of community and administration as it unfolded. Here all speak English; and radio news broadcasts, the primary link of the community with the outside world, provide a commentary which places the viewer on the same footing as the protagonists of the film. The structure of the film is very simple: a procession of officials of ever-increasing rank fly in and out, interspersed with news teams from various TV stations. Discussions between community leaders are interspersed with incoming officials addressing, in their various styles, the assembled community. The film is edited at a pace corresponding to these slowly developing events; cut-aways are at a minimum.

It is perhaps the slowly-building effect, of layer upon layer of action, that led a TV executive to suggest that *To Live with Herds* could never be shown on TV. It can be assumed that two problems exist: first, the deliberate low-key approach in filming and the consequent high level of apparent redundancy is not regarded as a suitable way to capture an audience not already determined to watch; second, the actual ambiguities which the apparent redundancy allows to emerge leaves the viewer to her/his own devices. Casual conversation among a Jie domestic group is not rated highly as a competitor with the garrulity of the average living room audience.

The five parts of *Diary of a Maasai Village*, broadcast on successive weeks, conformed to the length of the average *Disappearing World* film, and did involve some voice-over commentary; but there the similarity ends, for the 'diary' form adopted allows both character and event to develop in the fashion established in the films of the MacDougalls. Far from being 'bad TV', many critics read the films in terms of soap opera – varying from Lucy Hughes-Hallett in the London *Standard* who delivered blow-by-blow comment, to the headline 'Lie Back and Think of Ambridge' (*Daily Express*, July 3, 1984).

The filming of *Olamal* and *Diary* took place in 1981, a rough-cut existed by May 1982, and eventually the films were broadcast at select viewing times² in June-July 1984, and given a

² *The Women's Olamal* was screened on a Saturday at 8.15 p.m. on BBC-2, *Diary of a Maasai Village* on successive Mondays at 9.55 p.m.

good deal of exposure in the *Radio Times*. During the editing of the two films there was much uncertainty over the format that *Diary* should take, and whether the *Olamal* was too long. Unlike the *Diary* series, *Olamal* deals with one main event – the negotiation, and staging, of a fertility ritual. In this respect it is rather like the ideal-typical *Disappearing World* programme, comprehension on the part of the viewer arising from the fact that the narrative is purposively developing one diegetic line. But it takes two hours to do this. Thematic coherence is thus tempered by the slow pace at which the actual ‘story’ is told – only after repeated viewing does the apparent diffuseness of the first viewing give way to an impression of deliberate and skilful editing.

This is itself a tribute to the work of the editor of both films, Dai Vaughan.³ Llewelyn-Davies and Vaughan gave a great deal of thought to questions of length, pace and emphasis in the construction of *Olamal*, and it was for a long time unclear whether *Diary* was to be shown in one slab, on successive evenings, or in sections separated by several days. Thus the films were produced without the makers having any clear idea of to whom they would be shown – which in TV terms translates into questions of channel, day, time and competing programmes. The film-makers themselves respond to this by selecting subjects and constructing films largely guided by their own interests. Thus at this level there is no great difference from the situation of independents like the MacDougalls or Robert Gardner, once funding has been secured. In the case of *Olamal*, around three years separated original shooting from transmission. Quite obviously, then, no serious calculation of audience can be made at important stages in the construction of the film. Only perhaps in the final shaping of the film will it be practicable to introduce revisions resulting from argument among broadcasters and film-makers. And at this late stage, it is more than probable that the film-makers have become committed to the product they have so laboriously constructed and any significant intervention on the part of broadcasters can easily lead to acrimony. This was the situation with *At the Edge of the Union*.

One response to these circumstances is a resort to formula. By constructing a film to a set of guidelines on theme, style, length and pace, film-

makers can shape their material with a degree of security and broadcasters can present the viewing public with a programme rendered intelligible by its framing. The half-hour peak-time Monday film reports of *World in Action* are an instance of this, and the *Disappearing World* series developed the same kind of identity.

This ‘identity’ can be easily described: a film of 55 minutes dealing with one distinct community or even one protagonist; a title which emphasises this ‘monographic’ approach (*The Mursi*, *The Sherpas*, *Some Women of Marrakech*); a programme opening which emphasises a particular event or problem, and during which a map is presented so that the viewer knows the location; filming with available light and sound; ‘naturalistic’ editing of unstaged action; limited reliance on interview footage; substantial subtitling of speech; descriptive voice-over, sometimes by the anthropologist concerned, giving general background information as well as technical detail. Individual films deviate from this pattern – for example, *Eskimos of Pond Inlet* does without voice-over and uses cue cards for the necessary information; while in *The Kowelka* some re-enactment takes place.⁴ On the whole, though, the *Disappearing World* series established a functioning model for TV ethnography.

This model cannot be simply repeated without some revision, however, and the Festival’s screening of the last and most recent of the Mursi trilogy drew attention to this. Made in 1974, 1982 and 1985, under the direction of Leslie Woodhead and with the co-operation of anthropologist David Turton, the trilogy’s final part, *The Migrants*, is stylistically very similar to the original film. While this testifies to the strength of the model, it also suggests that the model is in need of revision. By contrast with the restraint and composure of *To Live with Herds* where the viewer watches and listens to actions as they unfold, and makes sense more or less of what is going on, and (importantly) is left with unresolved questions of what exactly has happened, the Mursi films are dominated by a voice-over which not only provides background information but tells the viewer what she/he is

³ The craft of editing is brilliantly exposed in Dai Vaughan’s biography of Stewart McAllister, *Portrait of an Invisible Man*, London, British Film Institute, 1983.

⁴ Peter Loizos, *op cit*, p 579.

seeing. In ethnographic film, every shot has to bear scrutiny as an item of 'ethnographic evidence'; but the more a commentary intrudes as a bearer of narrative coherence, the more some images are relegated to the status of visual background to a lecturing voice.

But again, this does no more than re-emphasise a problem that contemporary television has with words and pictures. Allegedly a predominantly visual medium, modern television constantly resorts to the voice as a primary device for lending coherence, while the pictures illustrate or frame speech. The preoccupation with film stories in TV news provides some kind of inverted confirmation of this – the image is assigned an important part in decision-making on the running of stories and the place they are granted in programmes, but in the majority of cases these 'news pictures' simply operate as a token of veracity.⁵ Only in rare instances does news film provide information to the viewer not accessible by speech or print. Given that much of British television is run by ex-journalists, such reliance on speech could be anticipated. But this does not excuse a failure properly to exploit the possibilities of TV as a medium; in particular, a more imaginative use of the TV image. The limitations of the *Disappearing World* model have more to do with the contemporary limitations of the use of television, and are not inherent to TV ethnography as such.

The third principal strand at the RAI Festival was represented by the work of Jean Rouch and his associates.⁶ Rouch began his session with the screening of Jean Epstein's 1946 *Tempestaire*, a short narrative of a fisherman at sea during a storm, while a woman waits with growing anxiety for his return. The scenes of raging seas sweeping the Brittany coast far outdo the storm sequences in Flaherty's *Man of Aran*; but not content with a 'better storm', Epstein plays with the images, running the crashing waves backwards and forwards, dimming the image and enhancing the impact both in sound and vision.

Rouch screened this short film drama to underline two points: the value of techniques drawn from silent film, and the importance of story.

Documentary film-making in the era of sound abandoned the artisanal model of the single individual or small group, filming and editing their 'own' material. This is evident in the

making of *Housing Problems* (1935), one of the very first British 'investigative' documentaries. Interviewing in the dark and cramped conditions of the London slums, a sound truck parked around the corner and scaffolding up the side of the house supporting an array of lights blazing through the window – this complex and rigid filming situation translates into a lack of fluency compared with the 1920s. This situation continued in British documentary through the '40s and '50s – apart from training in film-making leaning towards feature-film values, the ponderousness of equipment designed for use with sound recording, and the limitations of the sound recorders of the day, made location filming a cumbersome business. However, the invention of lightweight and silent 16mm cameras, the introduction of truly portable sound recorders, and, later, emulsions suitable for available light filming, advanced microphones, and unobtrusive equipment greatly altered the available options.

The advance to 'observational film-making' can thus be written as a technological history – technical development made it finally possible for film-makers to become 'participant observers'. But even with the special terms negotiated for the making of *Disappearing World* films (a crew of director, cameraperson, sound recordist, assistant and electrician), this was still a crew. Rouch, in his argument for a return to the age of silent cinema, is also making a plea for an abolition of the accepted division of anthropologist from director from camera operator. His idea of ethnographic film is one where the film-maker/ethnologist simply shoots material as a record of specific events or characters. The Festival screenings of four films made by West African students of Rouch for Niger TV showed how this would work.⁷ Two

⁵ In the same way that foreign correspondents' reports are broadcast as a phone call, rather than summarised. All this does is lend a veneer of actuality which adds nothing to the information conveyed and sometimes renders it less comprehensible.

⁶ Details of Rouch's films can be found in Mick Eaton (ed), *Anthropology – Reality – Cinema*, London, British Film Institute, 1979.

⁷ Joseph Gaye's *Baw-naa* shows the preparation of a rain-making ritual and its execution; Miriama Hima's two films *Baabu Bansa* and *Falaw* deal with rubber and aluminium respectively.

154 of them, set in a shanty-town, amounted to instructional films on the different uses one could make of old truck and car tyres, and how to recover scrap aluminium for cooking pots. Another concerned the organisation of a rain ritual. Yet these are not 'films of record' in any straightforward 'scientific' and positivistic sense. The films are as much about social activity and character as about the actual fabrication of shoes, wooden bowls or cooking pots. Rouch's argument for 'story' runs counter to the positivistic conception of film as a medium of ethnographic record. The examples that he used, however, tend to de-emphasise the role of editing in the creation of 'story', which is clearly an area

in which ethnographic film encounters problems. Notwithstanding Rouch's plea for greater simplicity in the shooting process, it should not be forgotten that the film does not end here: once the film is shot, a film has to be constructed from the material 'collected'.

Unfortunately the discussions at the Festival failed to pursue such problems. Film-makers were questioned on the familiar issues of confidentiality, anthropologists were generally unwilling to confront the film as film. Given the number of ethnographic film-makers present, and the range of their persuasions and interests, it is a pity that no real point of debate or controversy arose to galvanise those attending.

camera obscura/13-14



Reassemblage

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WOMEN AS AUTEUR-E-S: NOTES FROM CRÉTEIL

BY GINETTE VINCEDEAU

A tangle of tower blocks, motorways, and shopping malls, Créteil – to the south-east of Paris – is an unlikely cultural centre. Yet its local council contributed £30,000 this year to the Eighth International Women's Film Festival's total budget of £200,000, in addition to providing the premises, the Maison des Arts et de la Culture André Malraux, which became the permanent venue for the event last year.

The films in competition in this year's festival, held March 14 to 23, included 12 features, 10 feature- and medium-length documentaries, and 30 shorts. With the additional sections of '10 French film-makers', the 'portrait of an actress' (a new section devoted this year to Bulle Ogier), films selected by French regional festivals, and two major retrospectives, of Mai Zetterling and Dorothy Arzner's work, more than 100 different films were screened over a period of 9 days, in 6 different auditoria. In addition, space was provided for debates after screenings, usually with the director and other members of the crew. Producers and distributors were also given the opportunity to present their material to the trade at the film market running parallel to the festival (from Britain, Jane Harris and James Edmonds represented Circles).

From its modest beginnings at Sceaux in 1979, the Festival de Films de Femmes (henceforth FFF) has evolved into a major event supported by a considerable infrastructure, including two permanent organisers. Indeed, the FFF claims to be the largest women's film festival in the world, and to be copied (perhaps) and envied (certainly) in other countries. How this enviable situation has arisen (apart from the admirable efficiency

and enthusiasm of its founding organisers, Elisabeth Tréhard and Jackie Buet) is more a tribute to French cultural policies of funding for the cinema than to the strength of feminism in France. Having placed the FFF at the top of the women's festival league, Tréhard and Buet now want it to be a film event in its own right, capable of competing with other international festivals. It is a project which is both ambitious and riddled with contradictions, because the change in scale has necessarily meant a shift in emphasis – from the clear consciousness-raising aim of early women's festivals, to a more specifically film-oriented purpose.

Now that approval from the female film-making community has been more or less grudgingly granted, what is sought is recognition from the trade in the bracket defended by the FFF, that of *auteur* cinema, which, so the FFF catalogue claims, is what '99% of women' make. But, although it has been clear for some time that the category 'women's cinema' can no longer be used as a blanket term to describe the growing number of films made by women, the equation of women's cinema with *auteur* cinema is not unproblematic either. To the unresolved debate between women film-makers identifying themselves as such on the one hand, and those claiming their identity as *auteur-e-s* irrespective of gender (and hence often shunning the FFF¹), is added the tension inherent in trying to hive the festival off its 'ghetto'. The FFF also pays the price of its size by an increasing reliance on

¹ Notorious examples are Chantal Akerman and Diane Kurys.

media acceptance. It thus inhabits an uneasy terrain between two alternatives: remaining firmly committed to a defence of women film-makers, hence being 'unacceptable' as far as sections of the trade and mass media are concerned, or opening up to the film market, and losing the event's specificity. Crucial to an understanding of these tensions are the threatened place of *auteur* cinema and the present disarray of feminism in France.

Curiously enough, 1986, which sees a sudden interest in French feminism in Britain and in the USA² is marked, in France, by a noticeable regression in feminist discourse. The growing ambiguity of major literary figures such as Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva on their feminist positions is only one sign of this depressing phenomenon; generally speaking, feminism appears to be discredited or even a taboo subject in intellectual circles in France, and this is certainly true in the film world³. Feminism, associated with May '68 on the one hand, and with the 'excesses' of the *Psych et Po* group⁴ and of radical lesbianism on the other, is now perceived as old-fashioned, on a par with ecology and anti-nuclear movements. This ideological shift is echoed in the way the festival presents itself in its catalogue, and is seen by the French press. The 1984 edition (the last one to explicitly articulate a position on feminism), while still acknowledging the festival as the 'heir to feminism and cultural intervention', states that 'women's movements have gradually disappeared, leaving the feminist discourse way behind everyday reality', adding, in line with dominant thinking under the Socialist government, that 'institutions have taken over and have fulfilled the most urgent demands'. Feminism is thus relegated to the 'marginality of outdated sociological movements'.

The emphasis on institutional progress for women as cause of, and justification for, the absence of a specific feminist discourse—as if practice made theory obsolete—is widespread in France. It should be said, however, that the change in government provoked by the victory of the right at the March 16 elections (which coincided with the beginning of the festival) is expected to bring changes in this area, the now defunct Ministry for Women's Rights being seen to have, paradoxically, thwarted feminist debate in France⁵. In French cinema this theory-practice

duality is manifested in the contradictory situation of a *relatively* high proportion of women film-makers working in the industry, but of a lack of indigenous feminist film theory (and a surprisingly common ignorance of the important body of feminist film theory published in English).

In this context it becomes easier to understand the complex and sometimes contradictory set of choices that an event on the scale of the FFF necessarily has to make. The 50-odd new films presented at Créteil were culled from more than 500 viewed throughout the year—a process of selection which obviously had the film market in mind. With the unexpected popular success of Agnès Varda's *Vagabond* and especially Coline Serreau's *Trois hommes et un couffin*—both of which are opening in London shortly—the question of *auteur-e* vs commercial success was on the agenda more than ever and gave rise, in a debate between French film-makers (including Varda and Serreau) to some heated and sometimes caustic arguments.

Varda's status has long been established, but Serreau's trajectory may well be a test-case for women film-makers wishing to cross the boundaries between *auteur* and commercial cinema. Her first films, *Mais qu'est-ce qu'elles veulent?* and *Pourquoi pas!* stemmed from the early '70s women's movements. In the first one, women speak directly to the camera about their own experience, while the second one articulates a feminist utopia of gender role changes. *Qu'est-ce qu'on attend pour être heureux!* (1980), screened at Créteil, also has utopian undertones, but it demonstrates Serreau's expert handling of actors and understanding of performance (she is herself an actress) which are partly at the base of her recent popular success. Now that *Trois*

² Claire Duchén's *Feminism in France, from May '68 to Mitterrand*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, has just come out, and provides a good guide to the situation of feminism in France. Additionally, two journals, *Women's Review* (UK), and *The Women's Review of Books* (USA), have recently published special issues on French feminism.

³ I am grateful to Françoise Audé, author of the only book on women and film in France, *Ciné-modèles, cinéma d'elles*, Lausanne, L'Âge d'Homme, 1981, for her views on this subject.

⁴ The *Psychanalyse et Politique* group, a section of the French women's movement, famous for copyrighting the general expression *Mouvement de Libération de la Femme*.

⁵ For more details, see Duchén, *op cit*, chapter 7.

158 *hommes et un couffin* (1985), a comedy about three men left to cope with a baby, has received a César (French oscar) and amazingly overtaken *Rambo* at the box-office in France, Serreau has been signed by Hollywood to direct its American remake in the summer. Whether she will, like Diane Kurys, experience the classic clash between European *auteur* values and Hollywood methods remains to be seen, but her commercial success will undoubtedly put pressure on other French women film-makers. As the daily *Le Matin* put it in its review of the festival, 'distributors are now hunting for a new *Trois hommes et un couffin*.'

In the meantime, as the '10 French film-makers' section and the related debates showed, most women still experience difficulties in funding and distribution. This new section (to be expanded next year) marks the recognition by the festival organisers that their previous policy of not showing French films already distributed was detrimental to French film-makers. It also gives visitors from abroad the chance to catch up on films that have rarely been exhibited in Britain outside the London Film Festival (if at all) and, judging by the packed audiences, it fulfils a similar function with French audiences. This was the case for Aline Isserman's *Le Destin de Juliette* which, though questionable in its articulation of a 'victim's discourse', is a remarkable portrait of a working-class woman's oppression (based on a real case). Another film which unfortunately hasn't yet been distributed in this country is Charlotte Silvera's *Louise l'insoumise* (shown in March at the National Film Theatre), the story of a rebellious adolescent girl from a Tunisian Jewish family in Paris in the early '60s, caught in the twin bind of sexual and ethnic identity.

What was striking about the selection of 10 French films was their emphasis on aesthetic concerns and above all on personal expression, the traditional values associated with *auteur* cinema in the European sense of the term. Many women (in Britain particularly) have argued that a feminist film practice should be collective and have criticised the emphasis on *auteur* cinema as bourgeois (and male). While such criticism is valid, it should be pointed out that it comes from different modes of film production—workshops, cooperatives, etc, that do not aim at, or even cannot contemplate, normal distribution. The

point about the continental notion of *auteur* cinema is its commendable (if contradictory) desire to combine artistic quality, low budget and general distribution. Women's films basically tend to reflect the dominant structures available in their own country, and are found at the point where the industry offers least resistance. Hence, while British women tend to work for television, and some American women are beginning to make cheap 'exploitation' movies, French, German, and to some extent central European, films do frequently fall within the category of *auteur* cinema. Now *auteur* cinema, with its emphasis on personal expression, can lead to self-centred and narcissistic excesses—of which some examples were on display at Créteil—just as in its male counterpart, but it provides an opening for women in countries where independent features still have currency on the general film market (however precariously).

The selection of features (as that of other types of films) in competition was overwhelmingly European and North American, which, according to the organisers, exactly reproduces the proportions of those submitted to them. They also fell mostly in the category of realist narrative cinema, a choice reflected in the films awarded prizes. Magdalena Lazarkiewicz's *Przez Dotyk* ('The Contact'), a first feature produced by Polish TV, won the Jury's *Grand prix*. Much praised for the 'sensitive' handling of its overt subject, cancer, the film is a relentlessly claustrophobic study of two women (the camera hardly ever leaves the hospital), one of whom finds salvation through the other one's death and through maternity. The unambiguous essentialist ideology articulated by the film (women's finality is in procreation) did provoke some adverse reaction from the audience packed in the 900-seat auditorium, which makes the representativity of the jury's choice questionable. However, the arcane logic of jury composition at festivals operates at the FFF as in any other festival, importing constraints which are often alien to cinematic quality, or in this case feminism (for example, the organisers admitted advising the jury to reward films that would be 'distributable')⁶.

⁶ On an anecdotal level, Claude Olivenstein, a famous French doctor, was a member of the jury.

The audience's prize – it is also hard to say how representative it is – went to Léa Pool's *Anne Trister* (from Quebec). Like Pool's first feature, *La Femme de l'hôtel* (which won the FFF audience's prize in 1985), it reworks autobiographical elements. The heroine, Anne Trister, leaves Switzerland for Quebec after the traumatic death of her father; there she meets an older woman (Alix), to whom she becomes attached. The film purports to depict the protagonists' 'inner space', notably through Anne's beautiful but obsessive murals, which in effect become the star of the film. Despite its potentially interesting subject, the film is undercut by an air of glossy affluence and a recourse to Hollywood-style camera movements and an aggressive score, so that the first kiss between Anne and Alix unfortunately evokes the sort of kiss we've seen in a thousand movies, only between two women.

Another prize, from the Association of Women Journalists, went to Livia Gyarmathy's *Egy kicsit en... egy kicsit te...* ('A Little You, a Little Me') from Hungary – a comedy of behaviour set among a large family in Budapest, in which mother and daughter play a central role, and very much in the genre of Central European 'intimate' realism, with its emphasis on the mundane and everyday life. Perhaps the danger – but at the same time interest – of festivals is that films like Gyarmathy's, or Suzana Améral's *A hora da estrela* ('The hour of the star', from Brazil) which won a special prize for direction, are frequently watched in relative ignorance of the cinematic culture (or indeed culture) they stem from. In classic ethno-centric fashion, we tend to look at exotic cultural products for what they tell us *about* their culture, rather than for how they fit, in terms of genres for example, in their own national production, criteria which we do apply to US or Western European work.

This raises both the question of cinematic contextualisation in documentation (the Créteil catalogue is beautifully produced but the texts are more akin to publicity statements than analysis) and of the audience imagined by the film-makers – whether, for instance, they have a national or international market in mind. Or, as they are increasingly produced or co-produced by television (as was the case for the British feature in competition, Barbara Rennie's *Sacred*

Hearts, already screened by Channel 4) whether they are made primarily to be screened on television or in cinemas, a distinction that tends to be erased by the *auteur* angle.

There were two other English-speaking features in competition. First, Gaylene Preston's *Mr Wrong* from New Zealand, a witty play on Hitchcockian motifs and techniques, allied to an exploration of women's oppression by myths and fantasies, and their need for self-reliance. Preston has interestingly changed the emphasis of her source material (a story by Elisabeth Jane Howard) in which the heroine was portrayed as a victim, to a presentation of a woman who fights back. The film will be distributed in the UK later this year.

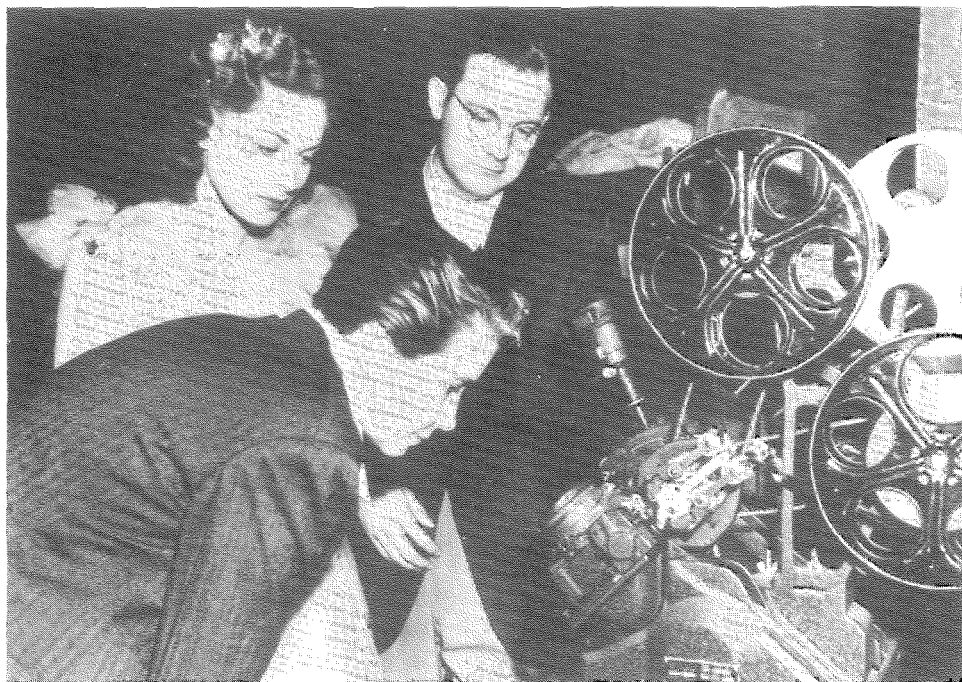
Secondly, there was what was undoubtedly the most stimulating feature film in the competition, sadly not rewarded by a prize: Yvonne Rainer's *The Man Who Envied Women*. As in her previous films, Rainer subverts the classic system of representation, using such distancing techniques as the splitting of the central male character – Jack Deller – between two actors, verbal and visual quotations (notably of Hollywood melodramas and *films noirs* projected on to the 'screen' of Jack Deller's unconscious/memory during his psychoanalysis sessions), the juxtaposition of different types of film stock, and, most strikingly, the non-visual representation of the central female character – the dancer Trisha Brown – present in the film as a voice. Accordingly, male voyeurism is replaced by a kind of 'aural voyeurism': seemingly cut off by the headphones of his walkman, Deller walks the streets of New York and sits in cafés, listening in on snippets of conversations between women. Although Rainer insists that *The Man* is not a sociological portrait of 'how it is' now, the film is the most remarkable filmic exploration to date of the state of contemporary (US) intellectual debates, particularly discourses about feminism and psychoanalysis, together with political considerations (US intervention in Central America, artists and real estate in New York). It is both a very personal film and one which makes an important intervention in feminist politics of representation.

Documentaries and shorts, being much more numerous and of very varied formats, were more difficult to 'make sense of'. On the other hand,

160 the very versatility of their formats and relative low cost traditionally make them a privileged terrain for women film-makers. Tréhard and Buet reported an increasing number of documentary submissions and a decreasing number of fiction films. Many of the documentaries shown, classically, dealt with social issues affecting women, such as incest (*Breaking Silence*, by Theresa Tollini) or homelessness (Lee Grant's *Down and Out in America*). Several films emerged as particularly remarkable: Mira Nair's *India Cabaret*, about women working in strip-tease in Indian nightclubs (screened on Channel 4) and Sophie Bissonnette's *Quel numéro, what number?*, a film about the impact of new office technologies on women's lives. One should also mention Mira Hamermesh's *Maids and Madams* (also screened on Channel 4), on black women working as maids in white homes in South Africa, and the very popular *Las Madres: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo* (awarded the audience's prize for documentary film), which details the struggles of Argentinian women (most of them uneducated and previously politically unaware) whose children were jailed, kidnapped or killed by the

military regime in the 1970s. Practically all these films use the well-trying formula of alternating interviews with newsreel footage, often with voice-over commentary. Two major exceptions: Ulrike Ottinger's 4 1/2 hour film on China (*China – die Kunst, der Alltag*), and Trinh T Minh-ha's *Naked Spaces* on West Africa which, like her previous *Re-assemblage*, challenges the so-called objective/scientific documentary methods used in ethnographic films.

With such a plethora of feature-length films, shorts do suffer in a festival. Apart from sheer memory overload, the viewer who comes to see a long, usually fiction, film, has a different set of time and narrative expectations and tends to overlook the short, in order to 'get at' the feature. Although shorts were traditionally screened before a feature, it is possible, now that this tradition has mostly disappeared anyway, that they would benefit from being screened in a separate context, in smaller theatres, for example (as was the case for Jane Harris' interesting *A Conspiracy of Silence, the Death of the Father* shown in the studio Varia). Rather than reel off names, I shall just mention a couple of short films that struck me in a very ambivalent way.



From the Créteil retrospective: director Dorothy Arzner on the set of *Dance, Girl, Dance*.

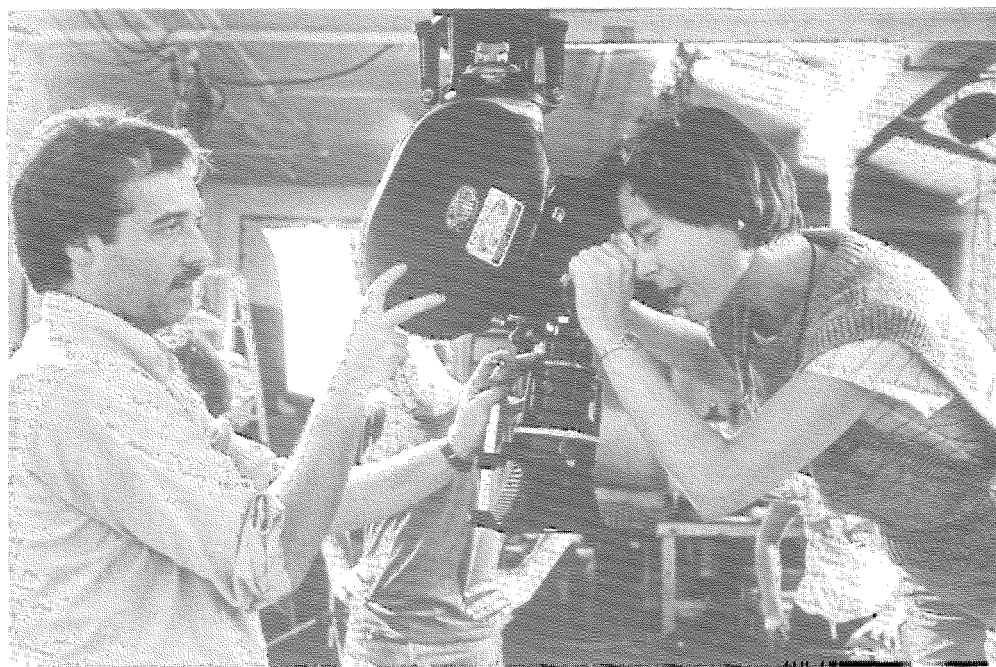
The first one is Marta Meszaros' *Ave Maria*, a powerful examination of the contradiction between the idealised myth of motherhood and the reality of women refugees in the Third World, intercut (and I would say undercut) by shots of Julie Christie verbalising the film's ideology straight to camera, shots that are both redundant and jarring in their didactic nature. The second one was *14 juillet 1939* (by Irène Teneze), a reconstitution, through archive material and contemporary footage, of Spanish refugee camps in the French Pyrénées (as well as a tribute to the director's father). One of the few films at Créteil to deal with history, *14 juillet 39* is interesting—it was also awarded the audience's prize—but its surprising emphasis on the Republican fight as a male struggle, left one wondering about women's role in the Civil War.

Finally, a few words on the retrospectives (Mai Zetterling and Dorothy Arzner), in a way the least controversial sections of the festival, as they offer the twin advantage of satisfying both the feminist quest for the 'hidden history' of women film-makers, and the press requirement for 'names' (the latter was also true of the 'portrait' of Bulle Ogier). The cinephilic dimension is

obviously what, in France, makes the festival 'acceptable' to the press—for example, the leading daily *Libération* devoted two whole pages to the festival during that week: one on Zetterling and one on Arzner. But it was regrettable that the retrospectives were not accompanied by more substantial documentation or debate that would have allowed for a *critical* assessment of these two women, who offer the archetypal contrast of a European 'art' film-maker and a Hollywood studio director.

Nevertheless, the Arzner retrospective provided the chance to see some material rarely shown in France, beyond the famous *Dance, Girl, Dance* and *Christopher Strong*—notably *Craig's Wife* (1936). In this film, Arzner not so much inverts or transcends the conventions of the 'woman's film' as pushes them to their logical(?) extreme. Thus the traditional woman's space, the home, becomes both materialisation and stage of the heroine's neurosis: Harriet Craig (Rosalind Russell) is a housewife in the most literal sense of the term, driving everybody out (including her husband) because of her obsession for 'order at home'.

Another Arzner film shown in the



(Photo by Abigail Heyman)

From the Créteil competition: director Yvonne Rainer on the set of *The Man Who Envied Women*.

retrospective, her last, *First Comes Courage* (1943), ends with Merle Oberon choosing to continue her work in patriotic espionage rather than to return to England with her lover, an identical motif to that of Ingemo Engstrom's *Flucht in den Norden* ('Escape Towards the North') one of the new features in the festival. In both cases, it is not a question of sacrifice, but of a deliberate decision, and both women are anti-nazi; in both cases too the political and the erotic are closely connected. I would not push the parallel further, but use it to indicate that despite the avalanche of films provided by the FFF, such unexpected comparisons were made possible.

The Créteil FFF will be a fascinating experiment to follow in future years. I have not been uncritical because its drive towards the film market and an ever-increasing audience (which, at 30,000 entries has almost doubled since last year) seem to spell all too familiar compromises. However, as a spectator and as the co-organiser of a women's film event myself (though on a different scale)⁷, I am full of admiration for the friendliness and impeccable organisation of the

whole festival. Not the least remarkable aspect of the FFF is its way of involving the local community. This takes two forms; first, the *cinéma à domicile*, which consists of screenings and debates of some of the films from the festival, in all sorts of venues in the region (this takes place before the festival; later some of the films tour other provinces of France). Secondly, tremendous efforts are made to bring the local audience (children, OAPs, etc) into the festival. Hence Silvera's *Louise l'insoumise* was screened to a very apt and very appreciative audience composed in large part of schoolchildren. However de-radicalised by commercial necessities, the FFF continues to make a significant intervention for women's work in film – still subversive enough to be considered 'dangerous' by sections of the media, not to say boycotted by some. We should anticipate the future of the FFF with anxiety perhaps, but certainly with sympathy.

⁷ The Norwich Women's Film Weekend, held annually at Cinema City, Norwich.

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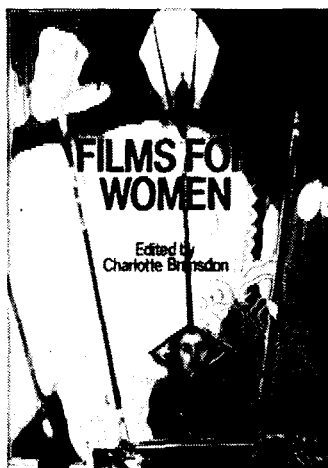
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LETTERS

From Phil Mottram, Administrator, the London International Film School, 24 Shelton Street, London WC2H 9HP:

I am writing in the hope that, through your correspondence column, I may be able to contact ex-students of the London International Film School (and its predecessor schools, The London School of Film Technique and London Film School) who are readers of your magazine.

The School had its origins in 1956, when a very small scale film course at the Heatherley School (and its predecessor schools, the London After a short period, trying to operate in a derelict greengrocer's shop in Pimlico, they moved to Brixton. From such unpromising beginnings the present School developed.

Although the name has gone through two intermediate stages, and although the constitution was radically reconstructed when the present School was formed from the wreck of the London Film School, there has been a continuous tradition, which has given all ex-students the sense of belonging to the same family of film-makers.

In September 1986, the School will be inaugurating a complete academic year of celebrations and fund-raising, to mark 30 years of its existence.

At the time of writing this letter, our plans are in the earliest stages, but we hope to organise a grand international reunion for all ex-students and former members of staff. For this to be possible, it will be necessary to contact as many alumni as possible, as soon as possible, and I hope that all graduates of LSFT, LFS and LIFS, who read this letter will contact me at the School, so that we can organise not only the reunion, but also the many other events we have in mind for our thirtieth anniversary year.

From Charles Barr and Thomas Elsaesser, School of English and American Studies, University of East Anglia, Norwich

We were surprised to see you take the unusual step of printing in your October-November 1985 issue (vol 26 no 6) a letter from Mr Edward Johnson making serious allegations against Film Studies at the University of East Anglia, without inviting us to comment on Mr Johnson's claim that he 'was not only insulted for (his) interest in Indian popular cinema, but prevented from studying it as part of (his) MA'.

Mr Johnson applied to change the subject of his dissertation, which contributes 50 per cent to the MA degree, at a very late stage when such a move would have been academically undesirable and adequate supervision would have been difficult to arrange. The principle of giving our students competent and responsible supervision is one we attach some importance to, and the decision taken in Mr Johnson's case had nothing to do with our ability to examine a thesis on Indian Cinema. Students have graduated from East Anglia on topics as diverse as Chinese Cinema in the 1930s, the Films of Chantal Akerman, Maya Deren and the American Avantgarde, the Cinema of Thorold Dickinson, D W Griffith's Biograph Films, Film Noir, Figuration in Dada and Surrealist Films. Where a topic exceeds our competence, we have provisions for calling on outside expertise.

In fact, the question of National Cinemas is one we have a particular strong commitment to. The journal *Framework*, known for its interest in Third World cinema, was edited from UEA for many years, one of our current PhD theses is on Early Scandinavian Cinema, and the very same issue of *Screen* carrying Mr Johnson's complaint contained an article taken from a successful PhD thesis on French Cinema in the 1930s written at UEA. Whatever point Mr Johnson wanted to make about the insularity of British Film Culture, it seems strange he should select Film Studies at East Anglia for his target, and stranger still that *Screen* should let it pass unchecked.

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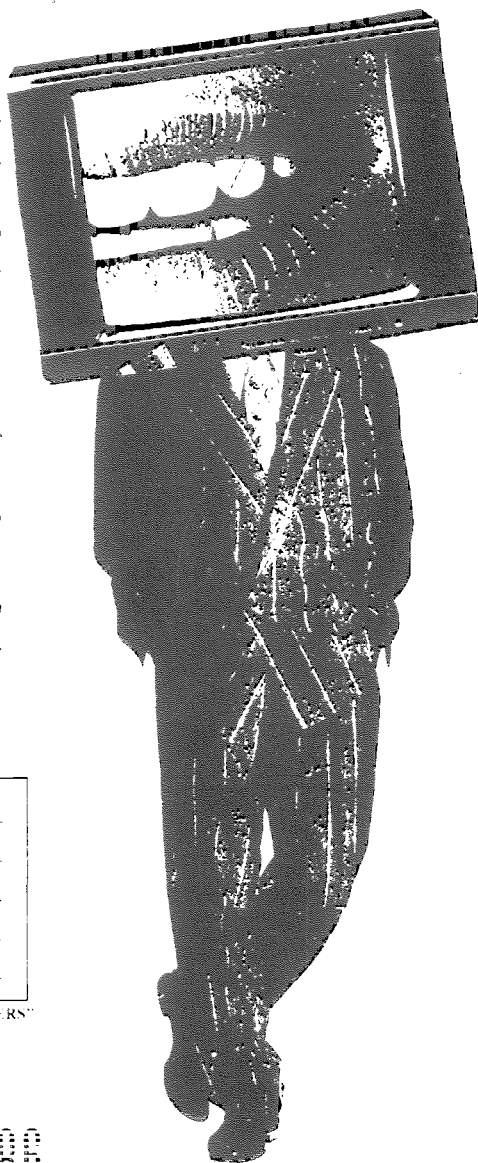
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